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Motivations, Opportunities, and Challenges in a Growing Field:
Organic Farmers in Metro Atlanta

by

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Abstract

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By Emily Cumbie-Drake

The organic food movement is rapidly gaining popularity throughout the United States as many mainstream food consumers realize that organic agriculture promotes human, environmental, and economic health. However, much of this food is produced within the industrial agricultural system, a method of growing food that often opposes the philosophies and ideals of the original organic food movement in the 1960s. Nevertheless, small-scale organic farmers supporting local, sustainable food systems still exist and thrive today. With assistance from Georgia Organics, this thesis explores the life of ten small-scale organic farmers in the metropolitan Atlanta area who have participated in the Georgia Organics Mentoring Program. Through participant observation on farms and semi-structured interviews with farmers, I examine individual's motivations for becoming organic farmers, what situations and opportunities allow them to do so, and challenges they face as farmers. This research reveals that organic farmers comprise a diverse group of passionate individuals who become farmers through a variety of methods. However, there is no single path to follow in order to become a successful organic farmer. The limited supply of organic farmers in the Atlanta area is unable to meet the constant demand for organic produce by hungry consumers. By describing the farmers' high quality of life, ability to make a living, and various paths of entering the profession, this thesis encourages individuals to consider becoming organic farmers in order to meet the increasing demand, while living a fulfilling and sustainable way of life.

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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

"We must also find ways to show the rest of agriculture (and the larger society) that organic farming can help address a wide range of important socio-economic, environmental, and production problems facing the future of American and world agriculture. We must show that organic farming is profitable because it is noble, not vice versa"

-Garth Youngberg, 1996 keynote address to the Organic Farming Research Foundation

Organic agriculture began as an alternative to the industrial agricultural system in the United States in the middle of the 20th century. As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, agriculture in the United States is at a turning point. Alternatives to industrial agriculture are emerging as more viable and realistic solutions to the agricultural status quo and the sustainable agriculture movement is gaining momentum and increasing popularity. Although rooted in a counter cultural movement, organic food consumption is now a visible alternative for mainstream consumers. Presently, organic food accounts for 1.5% of food sales in the United States and is growing 20% annually. The push for organic foods from policy and consumer demand is "huge and increasing" (Duram 2005:4). The number of farmers' markets in the United States has steadily increased from 1,755 markets in 1994 to 5,274 markets in 2009 (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agriculture Marketing Service 2010). Farmers' markets are often a source of local and organic products. However, in addition to farmers' markets, 72% of grocery stores now carry organic food, and in 2000 more organic foods were sold in mainstream supermarkets than in any other venue (e.g. farmers markets, health food stores) (Duram 2005:4). By 2010, it is anticipated that

organic food will represent 10% of the U.S. food economy" (DeLind and Bingen 2007:300).

As an alternative to the conventional food system, sustainable agriculture promotes food democracy. According to Neva Hassanein, food democracy refers to the right to safe and nutritious food, fair access to land to grow food, and a fair return for those who produce food. Individual consumers, producers, and activists, along with non-profit organizations, governments, and even some corporations, collaborate towards food system sustainability while becoming knowledgeable about their food and food system and sharing this knowledge with others. As the organic food movement is gaining popularity, individuals have the capacity to create the food system change they desire while promoting the health of the human and environmental components of communities (Hassanein 2008).

Sustainable agriculture is also linked to public health and the economy. Besides tobacco use, poor diet and physical inactivity are the leading causes of death in the United States. If Americans wanted to meet the recommended daily values of fruits and vegetables by only consuming domestically grown fruits and vegetables, over ten million more acres of fruit and vegetable production are needed (Hoefner 2010). Current agricultural production levels in the United States, fail to provide the recommended levels of fruits and vegetables to consume for a healthy diet (Hamm 2008:179). Therefore, agriculture and public health are strongly interconnected. Additionally, economics bear upon this relationship. Through the promotion of healthy food grown by local farmers using sustainable production practices, the benefits of sustainable agriculture are exponential. Increased fruit and vegetable production can create

economic development in rural communities while promoting public health (Hamm 2008:179). Hamm claims that sustainable agriculture is essential for the public health of the United States. "We cannot have good public health without a good, healthy food supply; and, simply put, we cannot have a good, healthy food supply now and in the future without a sustainable food system" (Hamm 2008:172).

As demand for organic products increases, a dire need for more organic producers emerges. This ethnographic study of ten small-scale organic farmers in Georgia strives to examine life as an organic farmer in an attempt to understand the limited scale of organic farming and why the supply of organic products has failed to increase in response to rising demand. In the past, sustainable agriculture has focused around environmental protection or preservation, and it was studied within the natural sciences. However, social dimensions, such as links between generations in farming families and fair working conditions for hired labor, are often elements of sustainable agriculture. These social components of sustainable agriculture have been scarce in past paradigms and studies. In "Food for the Future: Conditions & Contradictions of Sustainability," Patricia Allen (1993) calls for a new framework of sustainable agriculture that incorporates social approaches because they are imperative to understand in order to make the structural changes necessary to achieve sustainability. "A reformulation of its theory and practice is essential to prevent sustainable agriculture from reproducing the ecological and social problems of current food and agriculture systems [e.g. industrial agriculture], since agricultural sustainability is a socially constructed, ideologically based discourse that has as its root a social concept and problem" (Allen 1993:2).

This study will examine the social dimensions of organic farmers, and develop a more thorough understanding of the organic farming profession. The results of this study may contribute to efforts to encourage more people to either become organic farmers or transition their conventional farm into organic production. Very little anthropological research has been conducted on individuals' motivations for becoming organic farmers, the life of small-scale organic farmers, or the challenges to their work. However, demand in the Southeast region of the United States for local, organic produce is high and growing rapidly. In addition to filling the current research void, this exploratory and descriptive research will help assess barriers to adequate market growth of organic farming.

This work builds on the efforts of Georgia Organics to expand the number of organic farms in Georgia. Founded in 1997, Georgia Organics is a non-profit organization "working to integrate healthy, sustainable and locally grown food into the lives of all Georgians" (Georgia Organics 2009a). They develop networks of farms, gardens, and businesses to promote nutritious, locally grown foods through schools, institutions, work places, grocery stores, markets and neighborhoods. To help educate beginning organic farmers, Georgia Organics created a mentoring program where experienced organic farmers mentor individuals who are new and beginning organic farmers. Through collaboration with Georgia Organics, the structure of this research focuses around the mentoring program and all participants in this research have been involved in the mentoring program.

In this thesis, I begin with a discussion of organic agriculture in the United States throughout history and its importance for today's society, in addition to past research

about organic farmers pertinent to this study. This is followed by an explanation of research methods and profile of the study participants. Then, the findings of this study are described. The findings explore individuals' motivations for becoming organic farmers, opportunities that allow people to become farmers, challenges farmers face, the success of the farmers, and how farming impacts quality of life. This research reveals that organic farmers comprise a diverse group of passionate individuals who become farmers through a variety of methods, and there is no single path to follow in order to become a successful organic farmer. In addition, I will show that small-scale organic farmers are capable of making a viable income from their farming, although some rely on a second income from a spouse or additional job. Most farmers embody the ideals of the original organic food movement not only through farming but also by living an alternative and more sustainable way of life.

AGRICULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES

In 1900, farmers constituted about one-third of the United States' population. By 2000, they comprised less than 2% of the population (Guptill and Welsh 2008:55). Additionally, the number of farms declined from 6.4 million in 1910 to less than 2 million in 2004 (Lyson 2004:31). In the 20th century, agriculture in the United States became an industry. Over time, farm production became concentrated on a small number of large farms and most links between production and consumption were broken. For instance, many Americans do not know where, when or how their food is grown and produced. Currently, large multinational corporations control almost 60% of food and

beverages sold in the United States. These corporations control the production, processing, and distribution of food (Lyson 2007).

The United States' primary form of agriculture, commonly known as industrial or conventional agriculture, aims to "produce as much food and fiber as possible for the least cost" (Lyson 2007:20). Neoclassical economics is the fundamental social science paradigm behind industrial agriculture. Neoclassical economics expects that optimal efficiency and maximum profitability can be attained by balancing the four factors of production: land, labor, capital, and management/entrepreneurship. Furthermore, experimental biology, the core industrial agricultural biological paradigm, focuses primarily on increasing outputs (Lyson 2007).

Although industrial agriculture is currently the dominant mode of food production in the United States, alternative forms of agriculture have emerged. Farms have formed based on contrasting paradigms and ideals. Large-scale, industrial farming operations connected to national and global food producers are juxtaposed by smaller-scale farms and food producers focused on local food distribution (Lyson 2004:61). Sustainable agriculture provides an alternative to alleviate the negative effects of industrial agriculture for producers, workers, consumers, the environment, and communities (Constance 2008: 208-9). Industrial agriculture relies heavily on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, which kill most weeds, insects, and most of the living organisms in the soil. Pesticides include insecticides, herbicides, and fungicides, which kill or inhibit unwanted insects, plants, and fungi or fungal spores, respectively (U. S. Environmental Protection Agency 2009a). These chemicals are dangerous for the farmworkers who apply them to the fields, and they are also harmful to the environment. They seep into the ground and

pollute groundwater, and run off into fields and contaminate creeks, rivers, and oceans (Duram 2005:8). Organic agriculture is an alternative to this harmful system for growing food.

History of Organic Agriculture in the United States

There are a variety of definitions of "organic" and the meaning of the term has changed through time. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the term "organic farming" was connected to an assortment of food-growing practices. Organic farming, also known as "biological", "natural", or "low-input" agriculture, constituted a social and ecological approach to farming that existed as a possible alternative to agribusiness (Gottlieb 2001). Organic farming methods focus on crop rotations that build soil health and natural pest control, such as utilizing beneficial insects to kill unwanted pests (Duram 2005:8). In the 1970s, agricultural sustainability "in its present form" commenced during the energy crisis when people questioned pesticide use and energy intensities of industrial agriculture. Industrial agriculture relies on the intensive use of pesticides and fossil fuel based fertilizers. Interest in sustainable agriculture increased in the 1980s due to concerns regarding transnational issues such as global warming, ozone depletion, and acid rain, in addition to a recognition of agriculture's impact on resource depletion, environmental contamination, and pesticide poisoning (Allen 1993).

Most organic farmers in the 1970s and 1980s fit into Garth Youngberg's category of "eco-farmers", small farmers concerned with occupational hazards, environmental impacts, and pesticide use of industrial agriculture. These farmers were searching for a more sustainable livelihood, not a lifestyle change. However, at the same time, large

producers and manufacturers began to develop an interest in the organic market (Gottlieb 2001). At this time, there was no consistent definition for organic farming.

The lack of a uniform definition for organic farming was exacerbated by the United States' Department of Agriculture's (USDA) failure to promote organic growing in the 1970s. No USDA staff or financial resources were allocated for organic nor did most land grant universities support organic research. By the 1980s, there was increased pressure to include organic farming in cooperative extension programs and land grant colleges and their research entities (Gottlieb 2001). Shifts in the discourse about organic farming began to take hold in the 1980s. In addition to the growing pressure on the USDA, there was a regenerated sense of crisis about the United States' farm economy. Research noted the advantages of organic farming and the market for organic items was increasing, although the market share of organic produce remained quite small compared to the overall market. Additionally, the increasing popularity of a broader sustainable agriculture movement focused on farm size and ownership, rural communities and culture, and environmental and land management (Gottlieb 2001).

During the 1980s, although some states and trade associations created organic certification standards, most states had no certification processes. In 1990, the Organic Food Production Act sought to create a federal standardized certification process. A National Organic Program and National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) were established as a result of this legislation. From 1992-1997, the NOSB developed a set of recommendations for certification and standardization of organic production. The NOSB defines organic agriculture as, "an ecological production management system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is

based on minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony" (Gold 2007). These recommendations were similar to the approaches promoted by sustainable agriculture advocates. Publication of these recommendations, however, triggered reactions from regulatory and industry interests who wished to extend the definition of organic to contain components of industrial agriculture, including the "Big Three": food irradiation, use of sewage sludge, and genetically modified crops. In turn, proponents of sustainable agriculture adamantly protested these inclusions, setting a record number of public comments, 275,000. The Big Three were removed from the next set of NOSB recommendations (Gottlieb 2001) and the National Organic Standards went into effect in October 2002, a decade after the NOSB first began formulating standards (Wheeler and Esainko 2004).

Various players were involved in the development of the National Organic Standards and each had their own agenda. Consumers worried about risks such as food safety and personal health. Processors and distributors wanted to increase the profit of value-added organic products. Small farmers fretted that larger organic producers would out-compete them in the marketplace, and some even predicted that small organic producers would decrease and eventually become unviable as chain stores and large corporations stepped in to market organic products (Wheeler and Esainko 2004).

Industrial Organic

"Agribusiness has decided that the best way to deal with that alternative [organics] is simply to own it" (Pollan 2001)

Many large food corporations now market organic products on a large scale, and organic food is becoming a part of mainstream American food culture. Organic products

are grown on large, specialized farms, often owned by large food companies such as General Mills, Heinz, Nestle, and Dannon, and half of all organic food sales are in large supermarkets (DeLind and Bingen 2007). Guptill and Welsh (2008) characterize this industrial organic agricultural system as the "conventionalization of organics" involving "compromised organic standards mapped on to an otherwise-conventional (industrial) commodity system without the ecological integrity and multidimensional progressive values of the original movement" (Guptill and Welsh 2008:59). Although these products meet the criteria developed by the National Organic Standards Board, they do not conform to the ideals of the original organic movement.

The industrialization of organics, however, has created a wide range of organic producers and some assert that the USDA's definition as currently implemented does not encompass the true meaning and values behind organic production. Duesing asserts that before organic certification was developed, "Organic Farming" had different connotations for different people. "Its [organic farming's] lack of specific definition allowed many of us to associate it with important characteristics of scale, locality, control, knowledge, nutrition, social justice, participation, grower/eater relationships and the connections with schools and communities" (Deusing 1995-6:24). A rigid definition of organic focused solely on growing and processing practices threatens the philosophy and ideals of the original organic movement (Deusing 1995-6:24). DeLind and Bingen (2007) claim that industrial organics deviates from the roots of the organic movement and may produce the same situations the movement was designed to correct (e.g. factory farming). Large producers may out compete smaller farms while controlling and reworking the organic standards to "fit their capital efficiencies rather than ecological and

ethical principles" (DeLind and Bingen 2007:301). Small and medium sized farms are at a disadvantage to larger organic farms, while packers, processors, and retailers have gained power over the market of organics, including the international market (Wheeler and Esainko 2004).

Since the creation of the organic standards, a division has been created in the organic industry. Youngberg and Buttel describe the divide between organic "practitioners" and "romantics"/"visionaries." Practitioners utilize some or all of the non-chemical farming practices while "romantics" embrace a philosophical and ideological lifestyle associated with organic farming (Gottlieb 2001). Similarly, Granatstein classifies alternative agriculture in California as a "bifurcated organic sector" where one region of the state includes primarily "philosophically driven" farmers while another region has" business driven" organic farmers who focus on the profitability of the organic market (Wheeler and Esainko 2004).

National organic standards create uniformity in the "growing, processing, and labeling of organic food" (DeLind 2000:199). Nevertheless, the organic label does not guarantee social or environmental responsibility (DeLind and Bingen 2007). For instance, farm workers' rights and eating local produce, important components of sustainable agriculture, are not included within the organic standards. These standards fail to address the entire social and ecological framework of the original organic movement in the 1960s. "However pure the national standards, however complete the materials list and rigorous the certification process, they cannot address these deeper societal issues" (DeLind 2000:204). Many food advocates criticize the organic standards as appealing to industrial organics, focusing solely on the absence of chemical inputs, and

steering away from the social, environmental, and economic origins of the organic food movement.

Despite the rise of industrial organics, many growers still subscribe to the original ideals of organic farming. Similar to Duesing, DeLind and Bingen (2007) describe that organic farming is a place and time-specific practice that works in collaboration with the natural environment. "It is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Rather it embodies and is embodied in the wisdom that emerges from dwelling in a place, close to natural systems, over extended periods of time" (DeLind and Bingen 2007:311). No national standards can represent the diversity of organic farming across time and geographical space throughout the United States.

IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

Organic agriculture impacts consumer, farm worker, and environmental health, in addition to promoting food democracy and local economies. Some studies show that organic agriculture is beneficial to human health. Consuming organic instead of conventional produce decreases the amount of harmful chemicals, food additives, and colorings ingested. In select research projects, pesticides have been linked to various health conditions, including neurological damage. In particular, several studies are investigating the impact of pesticide exposures during pregnancy and early childhood in regions with high pesticide use in agriculture or household pest control. Researchers have found that children born to mothers with high levels of certain insecticides in their blood or urine perform more poorly on movement, intelligence, and behavioral tests than children born to mothers with lower insecticide levels (Engel, Berkowitz, Barr,

Teitelbaum, Siskind, Meisel, Wetmur and Wolff 2007). Additionally, researchers found that women with breast cancer are nine times as likely to have pesticide residue in their blood than those without breast cancer (Medical News Today 2004). However, many of the findings in these studies are controversial and often debated.

Pesticides are dangerous, and sometimes lethal, for farmworkers and their families. Workers may be exposed to pesticides through direct contact, contact with surfaces treated with pesticides, direct spray from pesticides, and drifts from sprayed pesticides (Das, Steege, Baron, Beckman and Harrison 2001). Farmworkers' families may also be exposed to pesticides from the residue on farmworkers' clothes, skin, hair, tools, and in their vehicles (McCauley, Lasarev, Higgins, Rothlein, Muniz, Ebbert and Phillips 2001:533). However, statistics on the numbers of pesticide related injuries and deaths are unreliable, particularly in migrant farmworker populations. Angus Wright, author of "The Death of Ramon Gonzalez: The Dilemma of Modern Agriculture" says, "There are many good reasons to believe that pesticide deaths and injuries in all countries, and especially Third World nations, are many times higher than those cited by the World Health Organization" (Wright 2005:4). Therefore, the full impact of pesticide exposure is unknown. However, in Das et al.'s study of pesticide exposure of farmworkers in California, they found that 30% of all pesticides used were on California's list of chemicals known to cause cancer or reproductive harm. Pesticide exposure is a major cause of acute illness, particularly skin disease, in California farmworkers (Das, et al. 2001:307). Organic agriculture, however, does not utilize these hazardous chemicals and therefore is a safer agricultural production method.

Furthermore, organic agriculture promotes environmental health. Organic farming prevents topsoil erosion, maintains a water supply free of contamination from pesticides, and saves energy by avoiding fossil fuel based inputs and fertilizers (Duram 2005). Instead of spraying harmful pesticides on crops, organic farmers employ alternative methods to manage pests. For example, crop rotation, the practice of rotating the crops grown in a field each season, builds healthy soils that have fewer pest problems and interplanting certain plants with one another also keeps pests away. Farmers may also utilize beneficial insects, like ladybugs, that kill destructive pests (Duram 2005:2-3).

ORGANIC CERTIFICATION

Farmers may practice organic farming methods but not be certified organic. For some farmers, the process of certification is unnecessary for their operation because they develop relationships with their customers who trust their growing practices and do not need to see a USDA organic seal of certification on the products to know that they were grown organically.

For farmers who wish to become certified organic producers, they must first find an organic certifying organization and then submit an application for certification which requests detailed information about the farm and production practices. Farmers must describe their plans to avoid contamination with non-organic materials, and producers take on the cost of certification. The National Organic Program originally estimated that certification would cost approximately $750 per farm. However, costs vary depending on the certifying organization, size and complexity of the farm, and inspection fees. Therefore, it is difficult to estimate certification costs but they may range from several

hundred dollars to over $1,000 per farm. The 2008 Farm Bill, however, includes a Certification Cost-Share program that will reimburse farmers up to 75% of their yearly certification costs (Organic Farming Research Foundation 2008).

A certifier reviews the application and then assigns an inspector to visit the farm to ensure that the farm is following all organic standards and operating according to the farm plan described in the application. The inspector "inspects the fields, farm implements, and buildings; reviews borders and adjoining land use; and assesses contamination and commingling risks…reviews all written records documenting management practices, seed sources, inputs used, compost production, conventional production done on the farm, and records of harvest, storage, transportation, and sales" (Kuepper 2002:4). The inspector then gives a report to the certifier, and the farm is either approved or denied certification. Once approved, the producer may market their products as organic and use the USDA organic seal and the seal of the certifier (Kuepper 2002).

CHAPTER 2:
PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON ORGANIC FARMERS

CHARACTERISTICS OF ORGANIC FARMERS

Organic farmers are not a homogenous group and therefore should not be studied as a single entity. Lockeretz states, "Just as there is no such thing as the proverbial "average" conventional producer, so, too, it is an over-simplification to treat organic producers as a single undifferentiated mass" (Lockeretz 1997:14). Much of the current research on organic agriculture includes the study of farmers who have transitioned from conventional to organic farming. However, only three of this study's participants had experiences on conventional farms before they began to farm organically so discussion will be limited about farmers who have transitioned. Nonetheless, because there is minimal literature on small-scale organic farmers similar to my respondents, research from studies on transitioned organic farmers will be utilized when applicable.

Ideological Orientations

Based on their research with organic farmers in Austria, Darnhofer, Schneeberger, and Freyer (2005) categorized farmers based on their ideological orientations: committed conventional, pragmatic conventional, environment-conscious but not organic, pragmatic organic, and committed organic. For pragmatic organic farmers, health, ethical, or sustainability concerns are not major motivations for converting from conventional to organic farming. Instead, they see organic farming as an economic opportunity for a secure income. In contrast, committed organic farmers adhere deeply to the founding philosophy of organic farming, and they are willing to risk foregoing some income and

will adapt crop and animal management practices as necessary to overcome challenges. With the primary aim to remain true to a philosophical idea, they choose organic farming because of producer and/or consumer health, and ethical and lifestyle considerations, rather than economic concerns. They view organic farming as a social movement and political statement, not just a set of techniques and practices (Darnhofer, Schneeberger and Freyer 2005). In a study of mid-size organic farms, Guptill and Welsh find that farmers' ideological orientations are not simply determined from farmers' background or experience in organic agriculture (Guptill and Welsh 2008:60).

Part-Time Versus Full-Time Farmers

Farmers may farm as a full time job or part time in addition to another profession. In her work with farmers in Dodge County, Georgia, Barlett (1993) found a variety of reasons for part-time farming. For many, farm work is a hobby or viewed as a second job. Economically, part time farming provides financial security or extra income as part of a retirement plan. It also allows families to continue an "agrarian farming tradition," characterized by independence and personal satisfaction gained from farm work (Barlett 1993:96).

MOTIVATIONS FOR BECOMING AN ORGANIC FARMER

Past research has found that individuals are motivated by a variety of reasons to become organic farmers. "Variations in individual farmers' attitudes toward agriculture are key to understanding what influences some farmers to adopt alternative methods" (Duram 1997:203). Farmers, however, rarely report financial incentives as motivations.

DeLind and Bingen, for example, found that economic benefits were not the primary motivations for becoming an organic farmer in their work in Michigan. "Although we want to make a decent living, we are not in this for the money. There are very few organic farmers who could not make a lot more money at some other kind of work" (DeLind and Bingen 2007:302). Organic farming often attracts individuals due to its principles and value placed on diversity, place, democracy, and spirituality.

Guthman (2004) describes the motivations for organic farmers who entered the organic movement prior to the 1980s. As previously mentioned, organic farmers during the birth of the organic movement had "deeply held political, environmental, philosophical, and/or spiritual values" associated with organic farming (Guthman 2004:23). Their reasons for joining the organic movement varied from a passion for environmental activism, a desire to follow the writings of sustainable agricultural scholars, or because it was "the right thing to do" (Guthman 2004:23). This range of motivations will be examined in this study of Georgia organic farmers.

Motivations to Transition from Conventional to Organic Farming

Some organic farmers seek to build alternative forms of production and marketing outside of the corporate-controlled agricultural system (Guptill and Welsh 2008). For some, organic farming becomes an alternative to conventional farming and for others it is an alternative to not farming at all. For farmers who switched from conventional to organic agriculture, a desire for environmental and social stewardship, not simply the opportunity for higher prices and greater autonomy from large corporate structures, propelled the conversion (Guptill and Welsh 2008).

Focusing on factors impacting the conversion to sustainable agriculture in Illinois, Salamon (1997) found that many farmers perceive that other conventional farmers adopt sustainable practices when their land is less productive. Her research revealed, however, that production levels did not significantly differ between conventional and sustainable farms. In fact, two-thirds of sustainable farm families in her study began sustainable farming practices due to an environmental or health event that triggered changes in production practices, such as cancer originating from herbicide exposure. However, these triggering events were not the only factor motivating farmers to shift their practices. Many sustainable farmers' mentors and role models were older family members who were adopters of some environmentally sensitive farming practices and were prudent resource managers in dimensions in their life beyond farming (Salamon, Farnsworth, Bullock and Yusuf 1997). Similarly, Burton, Rigby, and Young (1999) found that adoption of organic agriculture techniques in the United Kingdom reflects farmers' lifestyle decisions, and concern for the environment and sustainability of the food system, not simply an opportunity for increased profits (Burton, Rigby and Young 1999).

Duram (2000) researched structural factors impacting Illinois organic farmers' decision-making, particularly economic, political, social, and ecological structures. Economic structures include factors such as markets and production costs, while organic certification, agricultural policy, and information sources categorize political structures. Social structures include family, human health, organic and conventional agriculture in society, and American culture. Lastly, ecological structures, including ecosystems and soil health, were examined. Each of these structures impacts farmers' decisions to begin sustainable production. For some farmers, organic farming is the only way to remain in

agriculture due to high capital required in conventional agriculture (Duram 2000). All of these structural factors will be explored below.

CHALLENGES

Sustainable agriculture is an integrative farming practice that requires knowledge and experience. Farming practices must be integrative and holistic, and practices must not be viewed separately from one another. "It is often the case that no single practice, in isolation, will make a significantly perceivable difference to one's operation…This can complicate the adoption of more sustainable farming practices when those practice are considered and evaluated in isolation" (Carolan 2006:237). The combination of production practices creates a synergy that leads to successful organic production, and many farmers face production challenges. However, the scope of challenges for organic farmers extends beyond production practices.

Access to resources may be a challenge for organic farmers. In Lockeretz's research with organic farmers in the northeastern United States, he found that the biggest challenge to farming organically was economic, including production costs, low prices, and labor. Pest control and fertilization were the next biggest challenges (Lockeretz 1997). Salamon asserts that adopting sustainable farming systems does not inevitably produce financial decline (Salamon, et al. 1997). However, Salamon studied large, Illinois corn and soybean farmers transitioning to organic production, which contrasts this study's sample of small-scale organic vegetable farmers in Georgia.

Social components may also be a challenge for some organic farmers. In her study of Illinois farmers, Salamon (1997) found that a lack of family consensus and

community pressures were challenges to adopting sustainable farming for farmers who had previously farmed conventionally. Some wives who had a family background in conventional farming criticized their husbands' decisions to manage their farm sustainably. Salamon claims, "conventional farming appears to make more predictable management demands" and wives contend that alternative agriculture increases family stress due to increased work, less financial returns, the physical appearance of the farm (e.g. visible weeds that are not acceptable to social peers in conventional farming), and constant experimentation (Salamon 1997). Also, conventional farmers may be critical of other farmers for their alternative farming practices. "Traits viewed positively by sustainable adopters—diversification, flexibility, and environmentally sound practices—are labeled negatively by unimpressed farmers" (Salamon 1997: 270). Conventional farmers view sustainable farmers as poor managers based on their fields, yields, finances, and farm size. Conventional farmers and other community members' negative impressions of sustainable farming create a challenge for farmers adopting sustainable agriculture when surrounded by conventional farmers (Salamon 1997).

ROLE OF FAMILY

Organic farmers' families impact their farming operations in a variety of ways, particularly in regard to access to land and labor. Duram's (2000) research in Illinois on organic farmers' perceptions of, and behaviors towards, structural constraints in farming operations found that the family has positive and negative influences on farm decision-making. Family members may provide farmland, although some family members, often those who have a conventional farming background, may disapprove of organic

production techniques. However, some farmers reported that their parents or grandparents guided their organic production because they shared the value of the importance of integrating crops and livestock. In Duram's research, most farmers who rent land are in landlord/tenant relationships with other family members (Duram 2000). Also, family members often provide some of the labor on farms. The farms in Duram's research were farmed primarily by family members and part-time local young people (Duram 2000). Kinship and production responsibilities are combined on the family farm (Salamon, et al. 1997). Therefore, studying the role of family members is an important aspect of understanding the life of farmers. Family members may also provide additional income for organic farmers. Over half of the organic farmers in Duram's research stated that one member of the family must work full time off the farm in order to support the family. However, they also claimed that most conventional farms must do the same, so a need for off-farm income is not unique to organic farmers (Duram 2000).

SUCCESS

Farmers' subjective definitions of success vary depending on their goals, capabilities, and resources, and the nature of their farms and families. Additionally, regional, cultural, and historical context affects perceptions of success (Walter 1997). In "Images of Success: How Illinois Farmers Define the Successful Farmer", Walter (1997) groups farmers' views of farming success into four categories: Successful Farmer as Steward, Manager, Conservative, and Agrarian. The image of the successful farmer as Steward centers around care for land and the environment. Farmers who define success as Manager focus on success in terms of "analytical capabilities" and ability to run the

farm as an operation, including attention to farm records and sound production management. Conservative farmers find success through maintaining the farm as a family enterprise through stewardship, financial conservatism, and concern for family. Lastly, the Agrarian successful farmer defines success through hard work, practical knowledge, and community involvement. The Agrarian successful farmer values farming as a way of life but acknowledges that farming is also a business. Most farmers, however, do not easily fit into one category of success. Instead, economic, environmental, social, and cultural goals and values mutually impact a farmer's perception of success (Walter 1997:66).

Barlett (2004) also found varying definitions of success in her work in South Georgia in the 1980s. She contrasted two groups of farmers, and discovered that for men with agrarian ideals, success focuses around the value of farm life, family partnerships, and continuity on the land. Characteristics of success included continuing a farm tradition, sustaining an adequate standard of living for the family, giving children the opportunity to pursue a career of choice, and supporting kin, church, and community. In contrast, men with industrial ideals emphasize farming as a business and focus on financial success, such as stock portfolios or large farm investments (Barlett and Conger 2004).

GAPS IN PAST RESEARCH

Past studies of organic farmers have focused primarily on rural, Midwestern, large-scale organic farmers engaged in row crop[1] production. These studies do not

[1] Row crop: an "agricultural crop planted, usually with mechanical planting devices, in individual rows that are spaced to permit machine traffic during the early parts of the growing season" (U. S. Environmental Protection Agency 2009b).

provide insight on organic farmers in other regions of the country or those engaged in other types of production, such as the peri-urban, Southeastern, small scale, organic vegetable farmers in this study. Additionally, very little anthropological research has been conducted on the social dimensions of small-scale organic farmers. Therefore, this research will examine several components of life as an organic farmer that are missing from past studies. In particular, this study will explore farmers' perceptions of their quality of life and motivations for becoming an organic farmer after working in a non-farming profession, both of which are fairly absent from past research.

CHAPTER 3:
METHODS

RESEARCH DESIGN

I carried out research for this study between July 2009 and March 2010, which includes ten farms divided into two separate groups for analysis and discussion. I primarily collected the data through both semi-structured interviews and participant observation at respondents' farms. Emory University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study with exempt status.

JUSTIFICATION

In Lockeretz's research examining the diversity of organic farmers in the northeastern United States, he found that simple interview questions are not sufficient to determine differences among farmers and a more "sophisticated and intensive approach" is necessary to study organic farmers (Lockeretz 1997:23). Following Lockeretz's advice, participant observation was a key element of data collection because it provides qualitative data that is often unable to be acquired through interviews.

With only one year to complete data collection, analysis, and writing, time constraints limited the sample size of this research. However, a smaller, in-depth sample provides more rich, detailed data than a larger, less personal study design. After researching organic farmers in Illinois, Leslie Duram concluded that, "Organic farmers are highly diverse, so personal factors and operational behaviors are often difficult to predict and must be investigated on an individual basis" (Duram 2000:36). This study's research design allowed for individual farmers' practices and beliefs to be examined

through participant observation and interview research methods that built upon and complemented one another.

SAMPLE

The research sample was divided into two groups. Group One (mentors) consisted of five organic farmers who currently serve as mentors in the Georgia Organics mentoring program and have farmed in Georgia for at least four years. Group Two (mentees) included five participants[2] who are or were mentees in the mentoring program and are currently working on an organic farm. Three mentors are organically certified, but no mentees are currently certified. All participants were over the age of eighteen years old and lived within two hours of the metropolitan Atlanta area. Most participants, however, live and work within ninety minutes of the metropolitan Atlanta area and market their produce to Atlanta area consumers. The original research design included a Group Three category of former mentees who are not currently farming in order to examine some of the challenges for beginning and remaining organic farmers. However, due to difficulty in contacting these non-farming mentees, I only completed two interviews with Group Three respondents. Therefore, this information is not included in this research.

To select individuals for the sample, I worked with staff members at Georgia Organics to develop a diverse group of mentors and mentees based on age, gender, race, and farming experience. After creating a list of potential participants, Georgia Organics staff members contacted the participants by phone and/or email to obtain their permission

[2] In Group Two, a husband and wife farm together but are considered one participant, unless otherwise specified.

to participate. After participants agreed to be interviewed for the research, I contacted the mentors and mentees directly by email or phone to arrange a day and time to visit their farm. In July and August 2009, I also visited four farmers' markets where five of my respondents sold their produce. This process allowed me to introduce myself to the farmers and explain the scope of my research. I did not visit the other participants at farmers' markets because they were either not currently selling produce at a farmers' market or the market they were selling at was outside the metropolitan Atlanta area.

DATA COLLECTION

Participant Observation

I completed all farm visits between July and September 2009. For each Group One mentor and one Group Two mentee, I spent half to a full day engaged in focused participant observation, shadowing and assisting in their the day-to-day activities on their farm. At the end of the day or during small breaks throughout the day, I recorded my observations as detailed field notes. Depending on the farmers' schedules, I stayed at each of the farms for three to seven hours total. I engaged in a variety of farming activities, including weeding, picking, planting, and washing and packaging produce for market. This time helped me develop rapport with the farmers.

I also visited the farm of each Group Two mentee. Due to a variety of circumstances, I was only able to engage in farm work with one Group Two participant. Two respondents had already completed their daily farm work by the time I arrived mid-morning and the others had not planned to work on the farm on the day that I visited. However, I was given a tour of each farm.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To improve my understanding of the farmers' experiences, I conducted semi-structured interviews with each farmer during breaks throughout the day or at the end of the day of participant observation on their farm. One interview, however, was conducted with a farmer during his weekly produce delivery to Atlanta area restaurants. Interviews lasted forty-five minutes to ninety minutes and included questions about the history and current operations of the farm, challenges faced as an organic farmer, reasons for becoming a farmer, financial information, and involvement in the Georgia Organics mentoring program, among others. Interviews provided me with information about each farmer that was not accessible during participant observation. In addition, the interviews ensured consistency in my methodology, which helped compare and contrast farmers. Interviews were not audio-recorded, although I completed extensive interview notes during and at the end of each interview. See appendix for interview guide.

Follow-up & Additional Research

I made several follow up emails or phone calls to clarify information and to obtain information not included in the initial participant observation or structured interviews. In addition to developing a literature review of past research conducted about organic farmers, I attended several Georgia Organics' workshops and events in order to network with organic farmers, and food activists and to gain additional information about organic farming in Georgia. These events included the annual Georgia Organics Conference in February 2010, a tour of an organic farm not included in my study, a seminar about

beneficial insects, and a group discussion regarding the role of land trusts and farming in Georgia. Although these components of research are not included in the primary data analysis, they contributed to my research by deepening my understanding and awareness of issues pertaining to organic agriculture.

DEFINITIONS

Various terminologies are used to discuss alternative forms of agriculture and there are conflicting viewpoints about the appropriate definitions of each term. To begin, the term "sustainability" lacks a universally agreed upon definition. Rigby et al. (2001) notes that there is no consensus on the operational meaning of sustainability because the meaning differs across space and time and between individuals (Rigby, Woodhouse, Young and Burton 2001). Kirschenmann argues that sustainability always includes social, ecological, and economic dimensions but does not have a simple definition. Sustainability "is a process, not a prescription. It is a journey we embark on together, not a formula upon which we agree" (Kirschenmann 2008:113). Most definitions of sustainability include social, ecological, and economic components and address meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future.

In this paper, the term "alternative agriculture" and "sustainable agriculture" encompass all forms of non-conventional agriculture (e.g. certified organic, non-certified organic, industrial organic). "Certified organic" will refer to those units who have successfully completed third party certification. However, many non-certified organic producers are engaged in more sustainable farming practices than certified organic farmers. Therefore, "organic" will be used to describe organic production methods,

including both certified and non-certified organic farms. Farmers' own definitions of their production methods will be utilized whenever available and explained as needed.

CHAPTER 4:
THE FARMERS

MENTORS

David[3]

"We're doing nothing less than saving the world"
-David's partner, Mary

David was the first farmer I visited for this research. Within ten minutes of arriving at his farm, he urged me to pick a Sungold tomato right from the vine and pop it in my mouth. I had never seen this small, bright yellow variety of tomato before, and David explained that Sungolds are difficult to find because their skin often splits and they subsequently spoil before they can be sold at farmers' markets or in Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)[4] baskets. I typically strongly dislike tomatoes but this one was deliciously sweet and juicy, and the perfect size to eat in one bite.

Throughout the day, I followed David around his farm, and we completed a variety of tasks including laying drip irrigation, weeding butternut squash and pepper plants, seeding lettuce plants, and driving to The Home Depot to pick up supplies. By the end of the day, I had a blister on each hand, a minor sunburn, and slightly sore knees from kneeling in pepper plants for several hours.

David cultivates about three acres of land but the entire property includes forty-four acres of land. David's partner, Mary, manages the bookkeeping for the farm and

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[3] Pseudonyms are used in place of actual names of all research participants in order to protect their identity.

[4] In a CSA program, a consumer buys a seasonal subscription from a farmer to receive boxes of fresh produce on a regular basis. This is a common direct-to-consumer marketing method for small-scale organic farmers because farmers receive subscription payments early in the season, which helps maintain cash flow throughout the year (Local Harvest 2009).

sometimes assists with farmwork, but has another full time job to supplement their farm income. David grows a large variety of vegetables, some herbs, mushrooms, and raises chickens for eggs. He sells his produce at one Atlanta farmers' market and supplies produce to three CSAs in combination with several other farms.

Rebecca

At first glance, it looks like greenhouses cover all of Rebecca's farmland. However, they actually account for about only one acre of her six-acre certified organic farm. Before my tour of the farm, I waited for Rebecca to finish some administrative work in the office and observed some of her organizational mechanisms. One closet was filled with seeds in labeled containers and she posts a planting schedule that designates what seeds will be planted which month and where they will be planted. Rebecca's light brown hair was up in a ponytail and she wore Chaco sandals, dirty khaki shorts, and an army green t-shirt as she gave me a tour of her farm. Profanity was part of her vocabulary throughout our conversations.

Rebecca recently bought a house that is only a short walk through the woods to the farm. The main building on the farm has an office, kitchen, bathroom with shower and toilet, room to prepare produce for markets and the CSA, and a walk-in refrigerator. The entire building was very clean and was being cleaned by one of the crewmembers when I arrived. The farm is landscaped with flowers and bushes by request from the farm owners who want the land to look nice for visitors and events. Rebecca grows a variety of flowers, fruit, and vegetables, and sells them at one Atlanta farmers' market, up to twenty-one restaurants, and to her forty-member CSA program.

George

I was immediately impressed by the organization of George's certified organic operation. Large hoop houses, structures similar to green houses but open on each end, cover lots of his land and are essential to George's work because they extend the growing season and keep some pests away. A barn serves as a focal point of the farm, which includes a refrigerated room to keep produce fresh and outdoor sinks to wash and prepare produce. We worked together for six hours with a short break for lunch. Throughout the day, George wore an orange polo shirt, long pants, and a baseball cap that he would often turn and wear backwards. George inserted lots of humor into conversations with me and with the other workers on his farm. For instance, he jokingly proclaimed that the restaurants to which he supplies produce do so well because his vegetables are served.

One of George's relatives lives in a house on the edge of the farm and owns the land. The property is a total of 175 acres of land and I visited the six acres of land that surrounds the house. George is also leasing ten acres of land down the road from this main plot. George grows a variety of vegetables, herbs, and some melons. He sells his produce at an Atlanta farmers' market and at Atlanta grocery stores and restaurants. Approximately 50% of his profit comes from retail sales at the farmers market and the other 50% is from wholesale transactions.

Sarah

Upon my arrival at her farm, I found Sarah, two interns, and three volunteers working simultaneously to weed one small herb bed. I was quickly given a pair of

garden gloves and encouraged to join. Throughout the day, Sarah, the interns, and the volunteers worked as a team to complete various farm tasks, including weeding, picking and sorting tomatoes and planting basil. We enjoyed a delicious lunch at a nearby café that purchases some produce from the farm. In the late afternoon, we made a biodynamic preparation[5]. The team took turns stirring a fifty-gallon jug of water and powdered quartz. We divided this concoction into smaller containers and sprinkled the mixture across the fields, which helps stimulate and regulate plant growth. Sarah is certified organic and currently cultivates vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers on 3.5 acres of land. She sells her produce to a 111-family member CSA, restaurants, and one to two weekly farmers' markets.

James

As soon as I arrived at one of James's gardens, we drove to another one of the gardens because a pile of old tires had been dumped into the garden overnight. Tire marks on the grass revealed where a truck had reversed into the garden and rolled tires down the slope into the plot of vegetables. James was in awe, said that nothing like this had ever happened before, and quickly called the sanitation department to place a request to pick up the tires. The tires trampled several okra and tomato plants but there was no extensive damage. After handling the tire situation, I walked with James as he oversaw the work of five interns in this garden. Half of this garden was put into production for the

[5] Biodynamic farming is "a unified approach to agriculture that relates the ecology of the earth-organism to that of the entire cosmos…looks upon the soil and the farm as living organisms… combines common-sense agriculture, an understanding of ecology, and the specific environment of a given place with a new spiritual scientific approach to the concepts, principles, and practices of agriculture" (Biodynamic Farming and Gardening Association 2009).

first time this year and it was not very productive because the soil was not healthy. I helped thin some okra plants and harvest herbs, tomatoes, and squash. One of the workers picked several squash that were not ready to be harvested. James was upset about the wasted vegetable and threw the premature squash into the compost pile.

After returning to the original garden, I harvested beans for almost two hours and engaged in conversation with fellow volunteers. During a lunch break, we prepared for the weekly farmers' market located at this garden. In total, James has 2 ½ acres in production and sells his produce at his weekly market, a local grocery store, and two to three restaurants if he has leftover produce.

MENTEES

Alexis

Alexis is a slender woman in her early forties who manages a garden that grows produce to sell at farmers' markets that accept food stamps and Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) coupons[6]. When I visited her garden, she was wearing jeans, a t-shirt, and a blue piece of fabric wrapped around her slightly graying hair. Alexis is employed by an organization that works to fight hunger throughout Atlanta. This organization was founded over thirty-five years ago by "regular folk from different walks of life" who made the connection between illnesses and malnutrition in the community. They created

[6] "WIC serves women and children in families with income at or below 185 percent of the federally defined poverty level who are at risk for nutritional deficiencies. Participant categories consist of the following: pregnant, postpartum and breast-feeding women, and infants and children up to their fifth birthday" (Georgia Department of Community Health 2010).

programs to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to the community and wanted to address issues of hunger, poverty, and homelessness.

Alexis's garden has 2 ½ acres in production and the produce harvested is sold at four markets. They accept WIC coupons at all of these markets and are reimbursed by the state for the coupons. Alexis tries to grow a variety of crops and experiment with new varieties but she tends to grow what she knows customers will enjoy, particularly collards, tomatoes, and okra. In 2009, July and August were the only months that the garden had produce to harvest.

Alexis gave me a tour of the garden and we walked through the back door of the administrative offices directly into the garden. We wandered through a short wooded trail. Her organization plans to develop a nature trail in this densely wooded area surrounding the garden that can be filled with benches and places for meditation and relaxation. The trail leads to the squash and okra section of the garden. The squash patch had lots of weeds but appeared to be producing squash quite well. On one corner of the garden, there is a large compost pile that was created when someone volunteered to help make it. Alexis puts leftover or rotten food from the market into the compost pile.

Stephanie

Stephanie immigrated to the United States as a young child. Since coming to the U.S., she has lived in Georgia. Although she grew up in an urban setting, she recently moved to the country and now her beautifully decorated ranch-style house is located in the middle of her twenty-one acres of land.

I visited Stephanie during her summer farm day camp. Two pre-teen sisters, Heather and Ilana, were the sole campers. After I arrived, Stephanie gave me short tour of her vegetable garden. Although she has twenty-one acres of land, less than one-quarter of an acre is utilized for the garden where she grows tomatoes, basil, pumpkins, gourds, herbs, and peppers in raised beds. Most of her land is used for the horses that she boards. As Stephanie talked on the phone, Heather, Ilana, and I picked flowers from the top of basil plants in the garden to prevent them from getting bitter. Several of the tomato plants were falling across the mulch pathways separating the raised beds. Later in the morning, we went to one of the fields with goats and donkeys, and captured one goat so we could milk it and make cheese. Then, we put guide ropes on all goats and took them behind the house so they could eat bushes, and went to the donkey pen and tried to spray their feet with a spray to prevent them from itching.

Throughout the day, Stephanie talked on her frequently ringing phone and seemed to be juggling a variety of tasks at one time. She had to help with the campers at horse camp (another day camp on her land operating at the same time as farm camp), assign tasks to her employees, help her three sons who were at home, cook lunch for her employees, and run farm camp. After making breakfast, a snack, and lunch, cleaning took up a great deal of her time. Every day she cooks three meals a day for her hired help. Stephanie said, "The thing about farming is that it's mostly spent in the kitchen—cooking meals, cleaning…" Stephanie plays the role of mom, housekeeper, farmer, businesswoman, and secretary all simultaneously. "You have to learn to multi-task if you're a farmer."

Stephanie sells produce at a local farmers' market. However, she mostly sells food from other local people who have excess produce because she is not producing enough of her own goods to sell. In the future, she would love to sell raw goats milk, eggs, and more produce.

Adam

Adam's garden is surrounded by housing developments. He owns a comfortable suburban house with wood floors and high ceilings, and I was shocked to see a garden in this suburban environment. Approximately 3500 square feet in both the front and back of the house is cultivated but their house is on a total of 2.5 acres of land[7]. In the front yard, they were experimenting this year growing tomatoes in bags on top of the ground with white poles sticking out of them since the ground underneath is all rocks. In addition to tomatoes, they grow eggplant, squash, carrots, peppers, melons, beans, greens, Swiss chard, beets, spinach, broccoli, cabbage, and radishes. They sell their produce at three farmers' markets and a small amount of direct-to-consumer sales. Since I visited their farm, I have received numerous emails from their listserv, which have helped to update me on their operations. Most importantly, they are expanding the number of their CSA memberships as their customer base increases.

Allison

When I arrived on Allison's farm, she greeted me wearing a black t-shirt, overalls, and Croc sandals, and invited me into her house. Her farm is located in rural Georgia,

[7] One acres is the equivalent of 43, 560 square feet

almost two hours from Atlanta. Allison lives in a small, one room, tin building on the farm with her 2-½ year old son. They have a small air conditioning unit in one window and most windows are covered with blankets to keep the room cool in the summer heat. CSA members would soon be coming out for a workday to construct a separate room for Allison's son because they currently share one bed. For cooking food, Allison constructed an outdoor kitchen with three walls and no hot water.

Allison currently has two acres in production and hopes to reach her "ultimate goal" of five acres in production within three years. She is currently growing tomatoes, four types of peppers, eggplant, micro-greens, mushrooms, watermelons, cantaloupes, and cucumbers. Allison does not currently market her produce to the Atlanta market because there is enough demand for organic produce in her area. She sells her produce at a farmers' market and to her thirty-six member CSA. CSA members pay $75 yearly and then can purchase all produce at wholesale price from the farmers' market.

Steve and Jessica

I first met Steve and Jessica at a farmers' market earlier in the summer where they were both very personable and friendly. I drove to their house and farm in mid-August. They live in a simple but very comfortable house with five dogs and large front porch. The house is about 1000 feet off the street and three-quarters of an acre of gardens surrounded by deer fencing occupy their large front yard. The total property is twenty-three acres which includes hardwood forests they wish to keep intact.

Steve and Jessica have full time jobs as teachers for nine months of the year. The school year had already begun at the time of my visit so they were done gardening for the

season. However, in the summer, they sell their produce at three farmers' markets. When I visited, they were growing squash, beans, tomatoes, peppers, corn, and okra, and about 80% of their produce was heirloom varieties. We sat in their living room for the interview while Steve drank a beer and one of their dogs rested on Jessica's lap.

CHAPTER 5:
FINDINGS

MOTIVATIONS

As described above, the participants in this study represent a broad range of small-scale organic farmers in and around the metropolitan Atlanta area. As expected from their variety of farming operations, participant's interests in sustainable agriculture emerged from an assortment of sources. However, in spite of their various backgrounds, they embrace a clear professional and personal commitment to sustainability and the ideals of the organic food movement.

Despite the range of motivations, a family history of farming was not a primary motivation for this study's farmers. No mentors grew up in farming families and only two mentees were raised on a farm as children. Steve grew up on a farm and has an undergraduate degree in agronomy but never worked on a conventional farm after college graduation. Although she did not have a family farm, as a teenager Allison worked on a large conventional dairy farm. She helped with a few vegetable crops and a large family garden on the farmland, in addition to milking cows.

Innate Need or Desire to Farm

An innate need or desire to farm was one of the motivations described by most participants. Alexis expressed an innate desire to engage in organic gardening, despite having very little organic gardening experience prior to her current job as manager of an urban garden. Growing up, she was exposed to environmentally conscious individuals who grew their own food but she never engaged in these activities herself. As we sat in

the kitchen of her workplace, blanching fresh squash to freeze, Alexis reminisced about a school project pertaining to gardening when she was a child. All of the students in her class put a seed in a small Dixie cup, but her seed never grew. From a young age, she wanted so badly to be able to grow food. "Inside of me, that's [organic gardening] what I really wanted to do…it feels like that's what I'm supposed to be doing." Therefore, when given the opportunity to take over the responsibility of managing this organic garden, she quickly accepted the offer, despite her limited gardening experience.

Similarly, Stephanie said that she has always wanted a "natural" garden but lacked the knowledge and experience to start one. Soil, composting, and worms are all appealing aspects of organic gardening for Stephanie. However, she said, "I was extremely urban," before she moved to her current home in the country. Although she wants an organic garden, her original plans for her land were to build an agro-tourism destination with a dairy, cheese making facility, and farm to educate others through tourism. In the plans for her land, Stephanie's organic garden is only one component. Therefore, even if her garden does not succeed as she continues to gain knowledge, she has other opportunities because the goals for her land extend beyond organic gardening.

Eye-Opening Experience

In contrast to a longstanding desire to farm organically, Sarah's initial interest in organic farming came from an eye-opening experience while she was in college. Sarah studied environmental engineering because she was interested in the environment and wanted to help solve environmental problems with her degree. During one summer in college, Sarah visited friends employed on an organic farm in Montana and loved

working on the farm. Sarah said it was a "piece of heaven." On the very first day at the farm, she became more aware of the origin of the food she consumes. This brief experience "made a big impact with me about where our food comes from." When she returned to school, Sarah looked for farms to work on and found a farm on campus. Sarah got a job on this farm during the school year and worked full time during the summer. Sarah's initial experience visiting that farm in Montana during college propelled her into her current profession.

Dissatisfaction with Non-Farming Employment

Five farmers had other jobs before becoming organic farmers. One mentor and one mentee specifically stated that they became organic farmers because they were dissatisfied with their careers in the non-farming world. Allison had a job with an art exhibit and "made lots of money and had a big apartment, but I was miserable." Allison described sitting on the steps of the museum during lunch hour and wanting to be outside all day. She realized that making money and the art exhibit are "really not important," especially in exchange for the lack of time she was able to spend with her young son. Therefore, she decided to quit her job with the art exhibit and start working on a farm.

Additionally, George previously worked in the import and export and hotel business. He described that he was not making much money, was not very good at this work, and did not enjoy this line of work. "This world [in his previous work] was too much for me…too much talk." One day, a family friend asked him what he would like to do with his life. He responded, "I think I'd like to have a farm," and the friend responded, "Well, don't you have one?" One of George's relatives had land and had

gardened organically while he was growing up, and George would eventually inherit a portion of this property. At this moment, "things clicked." George went to his family's land, started preparing the soil, and growing food. Although George cites this conversation as the impetus for his beginnings as an organic farmer, his family history also affected his interests. George was raised eating a mostly vegetarian and organic diet. His family started a garden on this relative's land in the early 1980s, and he helped in the garden before leaving home for college. George's family organically certified portions of their land in 1986, prior to national certification standards, and sold small amounts of produce to help pay the land taxes.

International Interests

As an undergraduate student, Rebecca studied international development and anthropology. She lived in Ecuador for a year in college and became interested in sustainable agriculture. After finishing her undergraduate degree, she started graduate school at McGill University for soil science and had plans to pursue work related to international development. However, Rebecca was frustrated with the concept of international development in relation to domestic problems, so she stopped pursuing her degree. [It is] "hard to go abroad and tell people what to do when there are so many problems in our own society." She thought, "Maybe this [organic farming in the United States] is what I want to do." Then, she went to the University of California Santa Cruz for a six-month apprenticeship that combined academic training and practical organic farming knowledge. This program exposed her to many farming resources. Rebecca

claims that the apprenticeship made it easier to begin farming on her own because she had experience working on a variety of farms.

David was also interested in working abroad after he finished college. However, before he moved abroad he wanted to learn some practical labor skills that would be useful for his time outside of the United States. He also wanted a meaningful job related to food, so he worked on a farm to gain agricultural skills that he could utilize while abroad. Over time, the owner of the farm slowly gave him more responsibility, and David became involved in the local food community and his social group developed within this community. Then, David was asked to run a store that sold produce from the farm and to become a partner in the business. While working at the store, he learned how to market food and explain organic growing practices, different varieties of produce, etc. He was also offered a job as a nutritional educator. This series of events became a "catalyst" for remaining in Georgia and farming. Then, he was asked by a retired farming couple to farm their land, and at this point, he "realized that someone *can* make a living as a small farmer." Although he began farming with plans to leave Georgia, he is now committed to providing organic produce to the Atlanta area community.

FARMING OPPORTUNITIES

Regardless of their motivations for becoming an organic farmer, family, land, and financial circumstances influence individuals' abilities to begin farming and also impacts farming operations after they have begun to farm. These circumstances are often interrelated and impact one another.

Family

Family members may be a challenge or an asset for farmers. For instance, a farmer who financially supports children and a spouse will have more financial constraints than a single farmer, but a spouse may provide an additional income source to supplement income from the farm. Five farmers in this study have no children that they currently financially support; either they have grown children who they no longer support or do not have kids. George is the only mentor who currently has children to support. However, when he began farming, he did not have any children. Additionally, George is the only married mentor (David and Mary are cohabiting partners), while three out of five mentees are currently married. For some, family members supply farm labor or provide a second source of income, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Where to Farm

Owning farmland is not a prerequisite for becoming a farmer and four out of five mentors do not own the land they farm. Additionally, the fifth mentor, George, only partially owns his land. George's family purchased the land in the early 1980s, and George has since been given 15% of the land. George and his three siblings will eventually divide up the remaining 85%. However, George may purchase some of the land from his siblings.

Non-Landowners

There are alternative ways to gain access to land beyond purchasing, leasing, or inheriting land. Besides George, the other mentors acquired land in a variety of ways.

David farms on land owned by a couple that has been in farming since 1821. From the early 1970s to 2005 or 2006, the landowners organically farmed the land. Then, one of the farmers got sick. In the winter of 2007, David first developed a relationship with this couple. In February 2008, David and Mary moved from their home in Atlanta into a trailer on the farm and began farming full time. The landowners' children will inherit the land when they die, unless they sell it before that point. David and Mary have a formal agreement with the landowners that they will farm year to year and provide ample time with a notice if they decide they do not want them to continue to farm. They also have an informal agreement to continue to let them farm the land. However, these agreements will not hold if the children inherit the land.

The owner of Rebecca's farmland bought the land in 1998 but did not want it to be developed. He had an interest in organic agriculture but did not want to farm the land himself. The owner has "plenty of money" and did not want the land farmed in order to make money. The farm started in production in 2000, and Rebecca started working on this land five years ago. She does not pay rent or have a lease on the land. Rebecca described the owner as very "hands-off" and "awesome to work for" because he leaves the farm decisions to Rebecca. However, they made it clear to Rebecca that they want a "small diversified operation direct to market."

A wealthy investor owns Sarah's farm and all of the surrounding land. Similar to Rebecca's relationship, the owner of Sarah's land gives her the power to decide how to farm the land. Besides discussing her marketing strategy, budget issues, and her "grand plan" for the farm, Sarah said that the owner and her "just talk in passing." When Sarah arrived at this farm, there were no real plans or orientation for the farm and "the soil was

crap." Sarah chose to come to this land instead of other farms because she had the opportunity to turn the farm into what she wanted it to be. Sarah said, "I like having the idea of ownership," because of her ability to mold and transform the farm in her own way, despite not actually owning the land.

James farms in urban areas and all of his farmland is donated by community members who want to support his work as an organic urban farmer. I worked on two plots of land during my time with James. A woman who lives in a house on the property owns the plot of land. James connected with this landowner when one of his "associates" was getting her eyebrows waxed by the landowner, and she told the woman about their urban farming project. The woman was interested in having her land farmed by James and subsequently donated the land for this use. James acquired the second piece of land by simply talking to the man who owns the land and asking his permission to use it.

In contrast to the mentors, only two mentees are non-landowners. Alexis and Allison are the non-landowners. A philanthropic organization in Atlanta provides Alexis's organization with a one dollar per year, one hundred year lease, for their office space and the garden. Allison also does not own or pay rent on the land she farms. Her relationship to the landowner and farmland is similar to David's. One family has owned the farm for 150 years. Now, the land is divided between various children and Allison is farming a portion of the land owned by one of the children, Steve. Steve was a hog farmer until the 1980s when the conditions for raising livestock changed, making it harder for small operations to stay in business. Six years ago, Steve's wife, Melissa, started the organic farm and a CSA. However, Steve became ill so Melissa stopped her

CSA and most of the farming. Then, Allison came to farm seven months ago and restarted the farm and CSA.

Land Owners

Stephanie and her husband purchased their land but "The bank owns the land now" because they had to take out loans to buy the land. They moved to the land five years ago. Previously, it was used as an exotic pet zoo, had horses, and was a space for events. However, it was never before a farm. Similarly, Adam also owns his land. He and his wife bought a house and the surrounding land in 2004. Adam and his family moved to Georgia in order to buy more land at a more reasonable price than available in other parts of the country and in order to have more time to garden. Additionally, his spouse has relatives nearby and they wanted to move close to them.

Steve and Jessica purchased their land in 2004. Before, they lived in Atlanta but had regularly visited this area for the past fifteen years to see friends. The previous landowner had lived on the property since 1961 and lived across the street when they bought the land. He was "scared to death that a developer would get a hold of it" so when Steve talked to him about buying the land, he "interviewed" him to see what Steve was planning on doing with it. After approving their plans to farm the land, the owner offered a price that was too high for Steve and Jessica. A few days later, the owner lowered his offer, and Steve and Jessica could afford to take out a mortgage to finance the land.

How to Finance a Farm

Most mentees do not support themselves financially based on the sales of their produce. For instance, Steve and Jessica are both schoolteachers as their primary job and they do not rely on their farming income to support themselves. Similarly, Adam has a full time job not related to his garden that provides the majority of his income. He describes that money was not a major issue when starting his garden. He does not have any employees to pay, and he bought his house and land for a "good price." Stephanie's primary income comes from her husband's job, not from her garden. Her land appreciated very quickly so they refinanced and started taking money out to finance on-farm projects.

Allison is the only mentee that fully relies on her produce sales to support herself and the farm. Allison emphasizes a closed-loop system of organic farming that does not require high monetary investments. For instance, she strives to use inputs that are naturally available on the farm instead of purchasing them. However, the landowner pays for the cost of utilities on the farm and any necessary purchases if the farm is in a deficit.

In contrast, all of the mentors rely primarily on their farm work to support themselves. Several of the farmers, however, did not personally invest in their farms when they began farming. For instance, Sarah incurred no debt when she began working on her farm and has no financial commitments to the farm because of the financial support from the landowner. She started with a $20,000 per year salary and was provided a house to live in. She describes that it is great to have strong financial support for the

farm. It is "amazing to have some sort of subsidy," and Sarah does not see how this farm would be possible without monetary support.

Similarly, the owners of Rebecca's farmland contributed some startup money to develop farm infrastructure and lots of greenhouse infrastructure was already set up by the time Rebecca arrived at the farm. Some farm infrastructure was also on David's farmland prior to his arrival, and he did not take out any loans when he began farming. To supplement his farming income, he has a small second income from his nutrition education job and a small stipend from the mentoring program. Additionally, his partner has income from her job in Atlanta.

In contrast to these mentors, it was necessary for George to take out loans when he began farming. George is still paying off loans but no longer has to borrow any money. George is proud to say that he fully supports his family from the sales of the products from his farm.

CHALLENGES

Once a farmer obtains land and begins to farm, there are a variety of challenges the farmer will inevitably face. There are three broad categories of challenges that all respondents mentioned in interviews: production, resources, and knowledge. Challenges to production include those directly involved with growing produce, such as managing pests and building organic matter. Availability and access to resources, including farm infrastructure, land, labor, and time are components of resource challenges. Lastly, obtaining knowledge related to organic farming is a challenge for many farmers. All of these challenges are interrelated and impact one another.

Production Challenges

Challenges about organic production were more often addressed by mentees than mentors. In fact, some of the factors that the mentees identified as challenges are factors that the mentors tended to accept as part of the farming process. For instance, several mentors have accepted the presence of pests as a part of organic farming. However, mentor David, and mentees Steve, Jessica, and Adam, each mentioned pests as one of the day-to-day challenges of organic production. Steve, Jessica, and Adam had particular problems with large "pests" like deer and rabbits. "Pests are always a challenge" for Alexis and she named pests as her top challenge.

In contrast, in my interview with George, he did not mention anything about pests as a challenge to his organic produce production so I asked him specifically about pests on his farm. He responded, "Pests?...that's nature for you." According to George, pests are a challenge that any farmer will face and there is nothing any organic farmer can do to completely eradicate pests from the farm. James similarly discussed pests as a component of nature. As he showed me the different stages of some yellow pests on his green beans, James explained that pests are occasionally a challenge for his operation. However, James described that he harvested "tons" of these beans earlier and they did not have pests during this large harvest. According to James, crops are supposed to be seasonal and pests contribute to the seasonality of crops. Pests on those green beans help reveal to James that "their time is up." James is comfortable with pests in his gardens as long as he gets a chance to harvest lots of the produce before the pests take over.

Although he does not consider pests to be a major challenge, creating soil is a challenge for James.

Frederick Kirschenmann, the Distinguished Fellow for the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University and President of Stone Barns Center for Food and Agriculture in Pocantico Hills, New York, claims that farmers have a relationship with their soil, and "soil is a living, complex web of relationships that can provide enormous benefits when properly managed" (Kirschenmann 2008:114). However, reaping the benefits of soil management can be a challenge. Two mentors and two mentees cited building soil or organic matter as a challenge. James said that making soil was his biggest challenge, and Rebecca, Stephanie, and Allison also discussed that creating healthy soil is a challenge to their production. In particular, Allison had difficulty transitioning from her previous farm experiences in the northeastern United States and the high quality soil on the farm. "I took for granted the fantastic, black soil that needed barely any amendments." In contrast, she now has to devote more time and energy to building healthy soil for her farm in Georgia.

Only specific inputs are allowed for organic farming and three farmers discussed challenges related to these inputs. The Organic Materials Review Institute (OMRI), a nonprofit organization, determines which organic inputs are allowed in order to become certified organic. However, Steve and Jessica found it challenging to determine which inputs are permitted and find a supply of these specific inputs. Rebecca discovered that the supply of the proper inputs is very limited in her area because there are fewer organic growers than in other regions, which increases the price of inputs. In response, Rebecca became an organic fertilizer dealer on her own so she could purchase fertilizer at bulk

costs, use some for herself, and sell some to her friends. This decreased the price of fertilizer and shipping costs for Rebecca while supporting other local, organic farmers.

Although challenges typically have negative connotations, George concluded our discussion about challenges on his farm with a positive affirmation. "Dealing with nature [is a] never ending challenge. It makes organic interesting." For George, the challenge of working in collaboration with nature is part of the attraction to his career as an organic farmer. George perceives that conventional farmers work in opposition to nature. In contrast, his farm work demands respect and an understanding of his natural environment. Similarly, James's primary challenges are not those associated with production of crops. He explained that growing the food is not the challenge, because "God grows the food." James's primary challenges, however, are those associated with a lack of resources.

Resource Challenges

In addition to James, all respondents except one mentor and one mentee mentioned lack of farming resources as a challenge. Half of the farmer mentees reported that their primary challenge included a lack of resources. For this analysis, resources include farm infrastructure, land, labor, and time.

Farm infrastructure is essential for a farm's operations and each mentor and mentee had different levels of infrastructure on their farm. Infrastructure may include components of a farm such as an irrigation system to water crops, a cooler for storing produce after harvest, greenhouses to extend the growing season, and farm tools, among others. Some infrastructure requires a large capital investment and is therefore related to

some farmers' financial challenges. For instance, James does not have a truck to transport produce or a cooler to store harvested produce. However, he acknowledges that his farming operation has different requirements than others due to his location. "I'm an urban farmer…some equipment we don't need but some I do need." Stephanie struggles to develop basic infrastructure like tomato stakes and supports because of the time, resources, and knowledge required to do so. In contrast, some farmers began their operations on farms that had existing infrastructure while others had to develop all of their own. David's farm is on land that was previously farmed and already had an irrigation system and a greenhouse when he began farming. James, however, works with several plots of land in urban areas, often backyards or empty lots, with little to no pre-existing infrastructure. For instance, he uses tap water to water his gardens and therefore pays city water rates which are much more expensive than a water source zoned for agricultural use. The land that Allison is farming is filled with Bermuda grass planted prior to her arrival, which is extremely difficult to remove. Allison tries to rid the land of the Bermuda grass by tilling it and covering it with newspaper and mulch. However, old and rusty equipment is a constant challenge for Allison, and her tiller recently broke so she is currently unable to work on removing the Bermuda grass.

During the interviews, farmers were asked specifically if finances were a challenge or obstacle to their production. Only three farmers replied affirmatively. During the time of my visit, Stephanie was starting a variety of projects on her land, was financially spread very thin, and addressed the high startup cost necessary to develop infrastructure such as tomato cages or an irrigation system. Steve and Jessica would like to hire workers to assist with the farm labor but do not have the money to do so. David

found it challenging to find a balance between growing products that make a lot of money and those that he enjoys growing. However, no other farmers mentioned finances as a challenge to their work.

The physical environment is a resource that is also a challenge for some farmers. Sarah's land is curvy and hilly which makes each field a different shape and size. For some, planning, particularly for crop rotations, is difficult when the fields are not similar sizes or shapes. Similarly, Adam has a big slope throughout most of his land and after purchasing the land discovered that large stones were underground which required extensive removal.

Labor

Time constraints, labor, and finances are interrelated. Labor was a challenge addressed by half of all farmers interviewed. In this study, all mentors have the equivalent of at least one full time employee (e.g. two part time employees are the equivalent of one full time), and two mentors have up to five full time employees. In contrast, most mentees either farm on their own or with assistance from their family members. Steve and Jessica described their exhaustion from labor on the farm, their desire to have additional hired help, and their inability to hire help because of financial constraints. The high labor demands of farming negatively impacted their quality of life. Steve said, "We haven't taken a vacation since we bought this place [in 2004]." Due to the time and labor requirements, Steve and Jessica have decided to stop selling their produce at the farmers' market and focus on growing food for themselves.

Managing hired laborers was identified as a challenge for three out of five mentors. However, Allison is the only mentee that works on the farm with a non-family, full time worker. All other mentees farm by themselves or with some help from family members, so labor management is not a challenge for mentees because they do not have laborers to manage. David described his labor challenges as the "arch of busy-ness" on the farm. From April to August, David could consistently use more hired help but at other times during the year he can handle most on-farm responsibilities by himself. During these less busy times, he sometimes struggles to find tasks for his hired laborers to complete. Finding the balance between not having enough help and too much help is sometimes challenging. In contrast, George needs employees all year round, and he is concerned with finding long-term labor if his production expands much more. Additionally, the laborers on one farm were primarily undocumented Hispanic immigrants. Therefore, there is always a risk that these workers could be deported.

Sarah's biggest challenge is managing people, which she had never done prior to this job. She describes that she wants to be a friend, mentor, and role model simultaneously but finds it "hard to balance all of your roles." During my farm work with Sarah, as six of us weeded a large bed of herbs, she switched back and forth from casual conversations to miniature teaching lessons with the other volunteers and interns. At one point, she asked all of us, "How many feet are in an acre?…Okay, so how many are in half an acre?…in a quarter of an acre?" Her role as a teacher continued during a mid-morning break when she distributed a quiz to all the interns and volunteers. We were asked to match common names of various crops (e.g. broccoli) to their family name (e.g. Brassicaceae). Although she apparently has full control over the farm's

management and operation, she was open to suggestions from the interns and volunteers. For instance, one intern suggested we plant buckwheat in an empty bed, and Sarah quickly responded without hesitation, "That's a great idea." Although she claims that managing people is one of her biggest challenges, from my observations and conversations during my time spent with Sarah, I perceived that she managed others quite well.

Volunteer labor plays a role on some of the farms in this study, sometimes helping to reduce labor costs. In addition to two full time paid interns, Sarah typically has three to four volunteers working on the farm each week. James works with unpaid volunteers and interns that are paid three dollars per hour. On a day-to-day basis, he does not usually know how many people will be at the gardens to help out. James said, "There's nothing fixed about this thing." Rebecca does not currently have any volunteer labor but would like to have volunteers in the future. However, it takes time to coordinate volunteers. Rebecca already spends approximately a day and a half each week working in the office and she does not want to increase her amount of office work. Additionally, she understands the importance of gaining experience on a farm for people considering farming on their own. However, Rebecca takes pride in her well-paid crew of workers and said, "We shouldn't have people growing food for free."

Volunteers sometimes come to David's farm but not on a regular or long-term basis. The day that I visited David, a group of about twelve teenage boys and four Americorps members came to the farm to volunteer for an hour. The young men are part of a residential program that is offered as an alternative to spending time in a traditional juvenile detention facility, and they had been coming to the farm once a week throughout

the summer. On this particular day, we dug deep holes and put in about ten, fifteen foot poles to prepare for the expansion of David's chicken house. Prior to their arrival, David mentioned that sometimes the young men do not always cooperate and he sends them home early. However, there were no problems this day and we finished the work in less than an hour.

Time

In order to grow food and sell it to a customer base, a farm operation includes work outside of the farm field. Planning, marketing, and record keeping are necessary components of a farm operation. However, farmers have a variety of methods to divide their time between the fields and office. The time devoted to production compared to the business side of farming impacts the quality of life of some farmers. On David's farm, his partner does all the administrative work but he spends about 30% of his time on marketing and would like to do more "growing food and caring for plants." Similarly, Rebecca spends 60% of her time doing fieldwork and 40% doing business (marketing, bookkeeping, ordering supplies, etc). She works six days a week with two weeks of vacation in the winter and two weeks in the summer. She knows that this is not a healthy work and life balance but claims that it is "hard to not be here when the crew is here." However, her crew is well trained so they know how to do all of fieldwork without her constant guidance. Additionally, Rebecca enjoys the fieldwork more than the business work, and said, "I keep waiting for the business side to be less." Ideally, she would like to spend 70% of her time in the fields and 30% doing business work, or only spend 20% of her time doing business and not work the additional 10% at all.

Sarah also prefers work in the field to office work. She usually spends one to three hours each night sending emails or making phone calls, which accounts for about 20% of her total time allocated to work and the other 80% is on the farm. Sarah says, it "makes me crazy" if she works in the office too much but she enjoys the current balance she has between office and farm work.

Knowledge Challenges

Farmers acquire knowledge in different manners and about one-third of respondents said that farming knowledge was a challenge to their production. Place-specific knowledge about the land, local ecosystems, and weather patterns are necessary for organic farmers. This knowledge can be acquired in part through personal farming experiences and advice, suggestions, and recommendations from other farmers in the area. The Georgia Organics Mentoring Program is structured to be one source of knowledge for organic farmers in Georgia.

Although he is a mentor, David mentioned the continuous challenge of obtaining information about where to access people with knowledge about farming and to determine the location of organic products and inputs. The challenge is about "educating yourself while running a business." Additionally, David finds it difficult to determine the "rhythm of infrastructure", or how additional infrastructure impacts the timing of growing. For instance, his greenhouses created a more relaxed rhythm on the farm because they allow for more variation in the timing of growing and planting. Despite his previous farming experience, he still looks to other farmers for education and advice.

Similarly, Stephanie finds it difficult to access people with the "right" knowledge and expressed a desire to learn from more local farmers. She often uses trial and error when she gardens and acknowledges that she does not have as much experience or knowledge as she would like. "I wish I could've been an intern or apprentice." However, her family and other commitments make it challenging to gain experience from other farmers when she needs to be at home caring for her family and land. Additionally, her time constraints limit her involvement in the mentoring program because does not have time to visit farms and regularly communicate with her mentor.

For some, learning about the distinct characteristics of the specific locale of their farm is a challenge, even if they have prior farming experience. Adam was previously comfortable growing produce in the one long growing season of the northeastern part of the United States. However, when he first came to Georgia he realized that there are basically three growing seasons and it took him about two years just to learn when to plant seeds and how to grow in Georgia. Similarly, when she began farming in Georgia, Sarah had to learn how to manage new pests because she was not familiar with the pests of this area. "Pests were a little bit of a nuisance" until she became accustomed to managing them.

Uncontrollable Challenges

Most farmers accept that some challenges are uncontrollable. Adam spoke about disease on his crops as an uncontrollable challenge; disease "just happens" until crop

rotation is in place. Additionally, heirloom[8] varieties typically have lots of disease but customers like heirloom varieties so he continues to grow them despite this disease.

Regardless of extensive planning and attention to detail, some factors affecting farming cannot be controlled, particularly weather. For instance, Rebecca explained that this past year had a very wet spring but dry summer. Subsequently, her entire potato field rotted, which had never previously happened. Comparably, David discussed the difficulty of planning to grow when weather is variable. Allison is the sole caretaker of her two-year-old son, and he spends time outside with Allison when she is farming. She keeps detailed planning spreadsheets for her fields but she cannot control the weather, insects, or when her son does or does not want to do farming. She says, "It's humbling" and "you learn to be patient."

Other Challenges

Some farmers' challenges do not fit into the categories of production, resources, or knowledge. For instance, David says that he had to give up certain parts of life in order to make life as a farmer possible. David discusses the constraints that organic farming has placed on his social life. He moved away from his house and friends in Atlanta to live on farmland outside of Atlanta. It is "tough to keep up social networks" when living about an hour away. David also found it challenging to figure out what to plant and relate these plant varieties to customers at the farmers market and explain to

[8] There is no clear definition of the term "heirloom." However, in *Taylor's Guide to Heirloom Vegetables*, Benjamin Watson contrast heirlooms to hybrid varieties and defines heirloom varieties based on three criteria: 1) must be able to reproduce themselves from seed; 2) were introduced more than fifty years ago; and, 3) must "have a history of its own." Heirloom fruits and vegetables are grown for a variety of reasons, including for their taste and flavor and for maintaining the genetic diversity of food crops (Watson 1996:2-4).

them why certain varieties are grown. He tries to find a balance between the necessity of making money and simultaneously making customers happy.

George's primary challenge is his fear of the changing "culture" of organics. He is concerned that the word organic may lose its "powerful status" due to the weakening of the organic certification process and the trend towards more large-scale operations. "It's very important to me that the word organic means organic." He is also concerned with how industry changes will affect his operation and autonomy as a farmer. He is currently saving lots of seeds because he is worried about what companies will be the future sources of seeds and who will own the rights to seeds. For George, "It's a simple freedom…a right" to know how your food was produced, and he does not want the rapidly expanding and changing organic industry to negatively impact this right. Despite all of the challenges that farmers discussed, it is significant that creating demand for their organically grown produce was never mentioned as a challenge.

SUCCESS

When asked if they considered themselves successful farmers, four out of five mentors responded affirmatively. Each farmer mentioned various reasons for their success. Sarah said that she could not be successful without her team of interns and volunteers. Two mentors described their hoop houses and unheated greenhouses as the impetus to success because of their ability to grow produce year round and therefore create a year round income. Greenhouses are helpful because produce grows inside greenhouses when it is too cold to be grown in the fields. Rebecca said her unheated greenhouses are the "backbone to success" at her farm. Although the startup cost for the

greenhouses was relatively high, there are no costs for the greenhouses once in production so she feels they are good financial investment.

George stressed that it takes time to become a successful organic farmer. He said it took him "a good eight years" to become successful. Additionally, he connects his personal success to the success of the organic movement in the area. He thinks success lies in the number of customers at a farmers' market. The more farmers that are at a market, the more people are going to come and support organic agriculture. Although he did not specifically state that he considers himself a successful urban farmer, James said, I have a lot of satisfied customers." James measures his success based on his customers.

Although David does not currently consider his farm entirely successful, he said, "I'm aspiring to success." David said that learning and patience are necessary to be successful and, "This is a career you have to grow into." Similar to George, David explained that it takes time to achieve success.

Two mentees consider their farms successful. Adam said, "We're newbies but we do [consider ourselves successful]." Steve said that he is successful on quality but not on quantity. He considers his farm successful because customers like the products, even though "I [Steve] wouldn't give myself an A-plus." Allison thinks that she is a successful farmer based on her work on other farms. However, she does not consider her current farm to be a successful operation, particularly because it is in the southeast. "Everything is different," such as the time of year to plant and types of seed and how to work with the soil in Georgia compared to her previous farming experiences in the northeastern United States.

QUALITY OF LIFE

"It's all about living a simple life"
-George

Regardless of their perception of personal success, since beginning to farm, most participants in this study are pleased with their quality of life and are not farming for the possibility of large profits. Some are satisfied with their current financial situation but are working to increase their sales by expanding their operations, while others want to improve their quality of life by working less. The mentors' yearly gross sales range from approximately $50,000 to $350,000, and their yearly farm income is approximately $10,000 to $50,000.

George is very satisfied with his quality of life. He lives in a simple house with a small mortgage, the farm is his family's sole income, and he tries to travel a lot with his family. He says, "It's all about living a simple life" and "quality of life isn't monetary." George claims that he chooses to live a simple lifestyle and is not forced to do so because of the farm or finances. He works over forty hours per week, sometimes up to sixty hours, but does not want to work any more than this. George knows people who own their own business and work at least as much as he does. However, he claims that his work is "much less stress." Both of his children are home schooled and spend time on the farm during the day, and the "quality of life, it [working with my family on the farm] is really neat." Life as a farmer has other benefits, such as having a continuous supply of fresh produce. George and his family considered moving to the northern part of the U.S. several years ago. However, land was not immediately available and George said, "We're needed [in Georgia]." They considered moving in order to surround themselves with a more liberal and alternative community, but George is finding that the "people

we're seeking are coming towards us." His quality of life continues to improve over time.

Rebecca admits that her quality of life could be improved if she worked fewer hours. "I am just now admitting to myself that I work too much." However, several years ago she used to work even more hours when her financial situation was not as stable as it is now, and "the lifestyle is becoming more manageable." She would like to hire an assistant manager so that she can have more freedom to take time off. Since she grows food year round, she has no break during the winter months like many other farmers. However, she loves her work and states, "I can't be satisfied if I don't have fulfilling work." She would rather work long hours on the farm than work in another profession.

Sarah and James both have extensive support from their surrounding communities. Sarah's income is "more than enough to support my quality of life." She does not have to pay rent or bills for her housing and says, "I have nothing to spend money on." In contrast, James says that he is not making enough money to sustain his desired quality of life but also says, "I'm very lucky" due to the support from the community.

Half of the mentees intentionally scaled back their lifestyle in order to become farmers. Stephanie has dramatically changed her lifestyle since moving to her farm. Previously, she drove a Lexus SUV and lived a "plush life." Moving to the farm required a cut in her standard of living. For instance, her family does not go out to eat on a weekly basis like they used to. Stephanie is willing to make these changes in her lifestyle because of her commitment to her work. She said, "I love what I do. I have such a

passion for it." Stephanie does not correlate her standard of living with her quality of life. Stephanie has "found peace in having less" and says, "I have what I need." Her desire for material possessions has also changed. "I'd rather buy a $100 fruit tree than a $100 pair of jeans."

From my observations, Adam appears to have a comfortable standard of living. Two large SUVs were parked in the driveway of his house when I visited his garden. However, Adam told me that his family has been trying to slowly scale back their lifestyle as they increase their farming operations so they can continue their farming work and not have to make large lifestyle cuts at one point. For instance, they recently stopped paying for cable television. Since cutting back, Adam says his family member's lives are "better, healthier" and they "have a greater appreciation" for life.

Allison also cut back her standard of living when she moved to her farm in Georgia. "My toilet doesn't flush, I have no hot water, and I have an outside kitchen." However, she says, "I feel like I have a really good quality of life." She quantifies her quality of life based on the relationships her job allows her to create with others. "I make a lot of other people happy" by providing organic produce to the community. When she was working at the art exhibit, her son was in childcare all day long and often asleep by the time she got home. Now, she sees her son all day long. "It [organic farming] is really honest. I wake up everyday and grow food for people."

Steve and Jessica addressed the positive and negative aspects of organic farming in relation to their quality of life. Steve reminisces about his childhood growing up on a farm, and living on their farm "fills a void I've had since I left home." Additionally, farming has been a good complement to teaching middle school students. Jessica likes to

go to the farmers' market to focus on a "non-normal" paying job. When she is at the market it takes her mind off school, and when she is at school it takes her mind off the farm. Jessica jokingly said, "a plant doesn't talk back," compared to her middle school students. Steve and Jessica cite the rewards of gardening. "Work [in the garden] is rewarding" and "at the end of the day, all the work was ours." Steve said, "I love working outdoors…but not for the money you make." They have a "connected feeling" to their land and say that gardening is "spiritually rewarding." They are proud to say grace at a meal that comes from their own land. However, farming has taken a toll on Steve and Jessica's quality of life and they are planning to cut back the amount of farming they will do next year. They want to have a homestead model and take time to enjoy their land, which is not currently possible with the amount of work required to grow food for a weekly farmers' market during the summer. Working as teachers and as farmers exhausts Steve and Jessica and removes some of the joy from farming. Steve and Jessica hope to maintain these rewards of organic farming even though they will limit the scale of their gardening and keep their harvests instead of selling them at markets.

CHAPTER 6:
GEORGIA ORGANICS MENTORING PROGRAM

"The purpose of the Georgia Organics Mentoring Program is to develop the capacity of farmers and farms committed to sustainable agriculture and land stewardship." Mentees for this program typically have "less than ten years experience, a commitment to pursue organic practices, transitioning from conventional practices and/or those with limited resources." The program is funded by a grant from the USDA's Risk Management Agency. Georgia Organics solicits applications from interested mentees each August, and they are notified of their acceptance to the program in October. The program runs from October through September of the following year and costs $50. The program advertises that it allows mentees the opportunity to develop farm and marketing plans, attend free quarterly workshops and the Georgia Organics Conference in the spring, and get up to twenty-five hours of consulting time from their mentors. The application tries to gauge the interests and capabilities of the mentees in order to determine if they are qualified for the program and to match them with an appropriate mentor. The applications asks the mentees to describe their agricultural experience, what types and amounts of crops currently grown, on-farm challenges, existing infrastructure, etc (Georgia Organics 2009b).

Two of the six mentees in this study are currently participating in the program. The other four mentees participated within the past four years. Each mentee had one to three mentors with whom they worked with throughout the program. Most mentees visited their mentors' farms and their mentor visited their farm on at least one occasion throughout the yearlong program. Additionally, most mentees would call or email their

mentors if they had specific questions or concerns throughout the year. Mentees described a variety of practices that they learned from their mentors, including information about cover crops, building soil, farm and business planning, crop rotations, and finances. All five mentors in this study are currently serving as mentors in the program, and they each have one to three mentees per year.

Two mentors said that the primary advice they gave their mentee(s) was to "slow down" and to build their operation slowly. They warned that you will get discouraged if you take on too much, and if your farm gets "too big too fast", it will get out of control and create exponential problems. Rebecca said that it takes "three years minimum to start making anything [a profit]" because of the initial startup costs for infrastructure. Compared to the lesson about starting slow, Rebecca said that teaching about marketing and sourcing supplies is "easy to do."

NON-FARMING MENTEES

Each mentor in this study had worked in the program with mentees who are not currently farming. These mentees were part of the original Group Three for this study [see Methods]. Mentors described two primary reasons for why their mentees are not farming. Mentees either faced personal, unplanned circumstances or they began the program when they were unprepared to farm. Rebecca said that her non-farming mentees did not know what they were getting into when they started the program with the intention to become farmers. Either they had "too much on their plate" or "outside personal or financial pressure" that did not allow them to continue farming. Sarah said that some mentees were shy and did not contact her when her help is needed. Others had

"high hopes" of starting a farm and did not realize the challenges of farming, while others had uncontrollable personal circumstances that did not allow them to start farming as planned.

About 50% of David's former mentees are now farming. David's non-farming mentees either "hit roadblocks" early on or were not ready to farm by the time the program ended. However, David said that most non-farming mentees are still connected to the local food movement but just not as growers. He also thinks that some of his non-farming mentees will probably become farmers in the future.

Notable in this brief assessment of non-farming mentees is that the conditions of the Atlanta and Georgia market are not mentioned as barriers for beginning farmers. It appears that obstacles are primarily personal and not structural. However, no definite conclusions regarding barriers can be made until further research explores these issues.

CRITIQUES AND SUGGESTIONS

Although mentors and mentees were satisfied with the mentoring program, several of them had critiques and suggestions. One mentee wished that the program had more structure because it was too informal. He also wanted the program to be extended beyond one year. He worked with his mentor beyond the year of the program and had more questions during this time than he did during the year.

Additionally, one mentor said the program was sometimes unorganized. She thought that during the application process Georgia Organics should ask participants how much time they are planning to devote to their farm work because it is strikingly different

if individuals are farming full time or only on nights and weekends in addition to another job. Also, she would like to see a better matching of mentors and mentees in terms of region and geography within Georgia because it is hard to give advice if the mentee is in a different agricultural zone. She does not know much about the soil, pests, or crop rotations in other parts of the state. Additionally, it is harder to visit other farms when they are far away. Another mentor felt that this program pushed mentees to become certified organic, was too formulaic, and taught too much theory. He wished that the program would "teach more practical stuff."

Two mentees critiqued their own involvement in the program. One said that she does not have the time to have extensive conversation or several visits with her mentors but the "support is there if needed." She also believes that she knows what her primary problems are at the moment and she does not need to ask very specific questions at the moment. Similarly, another mentee said that her only complaints were about herself because it was hard to get away from the farm for a day in order to visit her mentors.

CHAPTER 7:
DISCUSSION

MOTIVATIONS

This study's findings about farmers' motivations support prior research that reports a variety of motivations for individuals to become organic farmers. Specifically, this study supports Burton et al. and DeLind and Bingen's research that found that financial incentives are not a primary motivation for organic farmers (Burton, et al. 1999; DeLind and Bingen 2007). Despite their various motivations, no mentor or mentee discussed financial opportunities as their motivation for farming. Rebecca summed up the general opinion of these farmers; "No one is trying to get rich [as an organic farmer]." In addition, a family history of farming was not reported as a primary motivation for becoming an organic farmer. Instead, farmers' motivations were based more on ideological orientations, which shaped their production methods and lifestyles. The farmers in this study, both mentors and mentees, are primarily "romantics"/"visionaries", not solely "practitioners," according to Youngberg and Buttel's grouping of organic farmers. Utilizing Darnhofer et al.'s categories of organic farmers, all of the farmers in this study exhibited several or all of the components of the *committed organic* category, including:

1. Deeply rooted in the founding philosophy of organic farming and their primary aim is to remain true to a philosophical idea;
2. Economic considerations are secondary and willing to risk foregoing some income;
3. Will adapt crop and animal management practices as necessary to overcome challenges;

4. Choose organic farming because of producer and/or consumer health, and ethical and lifestyle considerations;
5. View organic farming as a social movement and political statement, not just a set of techniques and practices.

(Darnhofer, et al. 2005)

Although Guthman found that farmers who began farming organically prior to the 1980s held unique political, environmental, philosophical, and spiritual values, similar to the Darnhofer et al.'s fifth characteristic of committed organic farmers, many of my farmers hold similar beliefs, which strongly reflect the values of the original organic movement. However, most of my farmers, both mentors and mentees, have been farming for less than ten years and were not farmers during the birth of the organic movement in the 1960s. Despite the rapidly expanding demand for organic products in the U.S. and the rise in industrial organic agriculture and its correlated diversion from the original organic principles, some organic farmers maintain these values and base their farm operations on such principles.

As Barlett (1993) found in her research with farmers in Dodge County, Georgia, some of my farmers view farming as a hobby or a second job, particularly Steve and Jessica, since they only farm in the summer and are full time teachers during the school year. All of the mentors, however, are full time farmers, and only one mentor has a spouse with an additional source of income. Therefore, based on the five farmer mentors as a representative sample, this committed ideological orientation is clearly a professional choice, not solely a hobby.

FARMING OPPORTUNITIES

Family

Previous research found that family is an important component of organic farming, particularly for access to land and labor (Duram 2000). However, only one of my farmers, George, has access to land because of a family member. In terms of labor, Adam heavily relies on his family members for farm labor but all other mentees and mentors farm alone, with hired help, with volunteers or interns, or with minimal assistance from family members. This is in contrasts to Duram's (2000) study that found that family members or local, young people conduct most of the labor on family farms.

Although I did not find family to be particularly important for land or labor, family was often essential in order to provide additional income. The spouses of one mentor and three mentees provided a second income source in addition to income from the farm. Additionally, two of the mentees that rely on a spouse's additional income work on the farm part-time and are employed in another job. This second job supplies financial support and benefits, such as health insurance, that the mentees' farm income alone cannot provide. As Barlett found of conventional farmers in Georgia, such family income is common.

Where to Farm

In March 2010, I attended *America's New Farmers: Policy Innovations and Opportunities*, a conference held in Washington, D.C. organized by the Drake University Agricultural Law Center. Throughout this two-day conference, access to land was discussed as a major challenge for new farmers. In contrast, no farmers in my study

described that obtaining land to farm was a challenge. This differing finding may reflect cheaper farmland in Georgia and the rural areas around Atlanta or may be an artifact of this study's methods. The methods of this research were designed to work with farmers who were currently engaged in farming production. All of the farmers in this study had acquired land at the time of the research, and perhaps farmers would have previously cited land acquisition as a challenge prior to obtaining their land. However, it is interesting to note that more mentees own their land than mentors.

Several of the mentors farm on land owned by wealthy landowners who want to support sustainable agriculture but not farm the land themselves. These landowners entrust the mentors with use of their land because the mentors have demonstrated their abilities to farm organically. Presumably, there are other landowners in the area that would like to partner with a skilled organic farmer, and there are farmers who are looking for land. Therefore, there may be unutilized potential farmland that could be in organic production.

CHALLENGES

As Carlo Petrini, founder of Slow Food International[9], stated during a speech Emory University in February 2010, *"Farmers and fisherman are the intellectuals of the land and sea"* (Petrini 2010). The knowledge necessary to become a successful organic farmer develops with time and experience. Patience is essential for organic farmers. In this study, farming experience prior to starting their own operation was hugely beneficial,

[9] "Slow Food is a non-profit, eco-gastronomic member-supported organization that was founded in 1989 to counteract fast food and fast life, the disappearance of local food traditions and people's dwindling interest in the food they eat, where it comes from, how it tastes and how our food choices affect the rest of the world" (Slow Food 2010)

especially in regard to farmers' access to land. All of the mentors, except George, acquired land for free because they demonstrated to the landowners that they had skills and knowledge about organic farming, in addition to a passion for organic agriculture.

Since organic farmers' challenges change through time and with their level of experience, mentees often described as challenges certain aspects of farming that mentors had either overcome or come to accept. For example, managing pests, crop rotations, and building soil were accepted aspects of farming for the more experienced mentors. Some of these challenges for mentees became easier over time as they learned techniques to handle the challenges (e.g. as crop rotations improved, pest management became easier). Mentees specifically cited production challenges, particularly managing pests, more often than mentors. Literature, however, describes that production practices are often a major challenge for all organic farmers. For instance, Lockeretz (1997) found that pests are a primary challenge for organic farmers in the northeastern United States. In contrast, the more experienced farmers in this study have accepted the challenge of dealing with pests as a feature of organic farming, which may reflect their years of experience with non-chemical pest control.

Understanding organic production also requires time and experience in specific locations. For instance, Allison is an experienced organic farmer but she is accustomed to farming in the northeastern part of the U.S. and had to learn specific production practices for growing in Georgia. Therefore, organic production requires location-specific knowledge about the soil, pests, weather patterns, etc. Farmer to farmer exchange of knowledge, through organized and unorganized programs, is extremely helpful for

both beginning and experienced farmers, particularly for exchange of place-specific knowledge.

Labor

Most mentees farm on their own or with help from family members. However, all mentors have hired help on their farm. Some mentees would like to employ non-family members to work on their farm but do not have the financial stability to do so. Additionally, the small scale of some of the mentees' farms does not require additional laborers. One farmer estimated that one worker is needed for each acre of land in production in vegetable crops. Therefore, labor demands increase as the scale of production increases. Management of on-farm employees was identified as a challenge, whereas access and funding for laborers was not. Operating a successful organic farm is not solely about crop production, but includes managing laborers and all the additional challenges involved with running a business.

Other Challenges

Salamon's (1997) research with farmers transitioning from conventional to organic production found that pressure from community and family members was often a barrier to transition to organic farming. Although none of my farmers transitioned from conventional to organic production, community and family members were strongly supportive the farmers in my study. There is a large support network for farmers around Atlanta, which I experienced first hand at the Georgia Organics Conference in February 2010 and at various workshops throughout my year of research. None of my farmers

discussed any interactions with nearby conventional farmers, and I do not know if they have any interaction with local conventional farmers. Perhaps organic farmers who market their products outside of Atlanta and who are in more rural areas have more interaction with conventional farmers that could present a challenge to being accepted as a legitimate farmer.

Although Salamon's findings are not echoed in my findings, the decision to farm may impact one's social life, especially in rural areas. However, this study demonstrates that there are ways to maintain a meaningful social life as a farmer. It is unlikely that the farmers in this study would have testified about the high quality of their lives if they did not have valuable social connections. For example, direct marketing to consumers at weekly farmers' markets is one way to experience a social connection with customers. Throughout the past nine months, I ran into several of my interviewees at Slow Food Atlanta or Georgia Organics' events. These organizations provide a social outlet for farmers and "foodies" alike. Additionally, one north Georgia organic farmer that I met in October 2009, but who is not in this study, farms nine months out of the year and lives in Atlanta during the winter months. In Atlanta she works as a landscape designer, which allows her to make an additional income when crops are not in production. However, she also utilizes this time in Atlanta to spend time with friends and maintain social networks.

Throughout the interviews, several mentors and mentees provided advice about how they addressed some of their biggest challenges. Several farmers recommended gaining as much farming experience as possible and experimenting through trial and error. David encourages farmers to stay informed and knowledgeable about farming by

maintaining a network for information exchange between farmers, subscribing to farming publications, attending conferences, and utilizing Internet resources.

Rebecca stressed that there is an "endless amount of work" on the farm and it is helpful to focus on preventable work because it will save time and money in the long run. For instance, she often takes leaves off the bottom of plants that may be diseased in order to keep any disease from spreading. Adam suggested that anything new (e.g. production methods, crops) should be experimented on a small scale before implementing large changes in production.

Farmers also emphasized the importance of record keeping to track changes over time and plan for future crops. Records may include information about when seeds are planted, what type of crop is planted in each field, and the yields of fields.

SUCCESS

Despite all of the challenges that farmers discussed, financial constraints and creating demand for their organically grown produce was rarely mentioned. Finances are often not perceived as a challenge because the farmers accept that small-scale organic farming may not be an especially financially lucrative profession. Additionally, Atlanta is a strong, consistent market for organic produce. Several times throughout the year, I visited the Morningside Farmers' Market in Atlanta, a certified organic market, and was disappointed when I arrived at 10am and almost all of the produce had been purchased in less than three hours. The success of this market impacts farmers' perceptions of their own success.

The farmers in this study primarily measured success according to two corresponding categories: on-farm production and distribution of products to customers. Simply put, farmers must grow food and then sell this food. Knowledge and experience are required in order to do both. Although farmers have different standards for success, a minimum requirement for success includes production of organic produce and creation of a customer base to purchase the products. Walter (1997) found that most organic farmers in Illinois do not easily fit into one category of success. He categorized success in four categories, Successful Farmer as Steward, Manager, Conservative, and Agrarian, and found that economic, environmental, social, and cultural goals and values mutually impact a farmer's perception of success. The majority of my farmers fit most closely in Walter's Successful Farmer as Agrarian category. The Agrarian farmer defines success through hard work, practical knowledge, and community involvement and values farming as a way of life while acknowledging that farming is also a business (Walter 1997).

The success of my farmers would not be possible without the Atlanta area support for small organic farmers. Customers create the high demand and are willing to pay higher prices for organic produce, as I experienced from my mid-morning visits to the Morningside Market.

QUALITY OF LIFE

"Quality of life" is a relative term that individuals define differently from one another. Regardless of this definition, however, my farmers readily spoke about their high quality of life. Several farmers explained that they became farmers because of their dissatisfaction with non-farming employment. They were searching for a more

meaningful career and since becoming farmers, their quality of life has improved, even though it is physically challenging work, often with long hours.

Living a more sustainable way of life positively impacts the quality of life of these farmers. Despite the diversity among this study's farmers, the farmers are idealistic and embody an idealism of sustainability in their daily lives, not only in their farming practices. They take pride in consuming food grown on their land, supporting the local economy through purchases from other local farmers or businesses, and reducing their overall impact on the environment. Most importantly, these farmers are fulfilled by their ability to make a viable income from their organic farming.

Several mentees discussed lowering their standard of living in order to accommodate their work as a farmer. For instance, Adam's family is slowing cutting back by not purchasing the "unnecessary" material goods. However, they do not correlate quality of life with material affluence and believe they will maintain or improve their quality of life as they lower their standard of living.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Although the findings of this study are significant, the structure of this research project does not provide a basis for any generalizations about organic farmers as a whole in Georgia or in the United States. This research could have been more in-depth but I strived to obtain as much detail as possible with less than one year to complete farm visits, interviews, analysis, and compilation of the findings. Readers should be careful not to assume that all organic farmers are similar to those in this study, especially farmers with large-scale organic farms or those in other regions of the United States. Location

strongly impacts an organic farmer's production. For instance, organic farmers in Georgia who do not market to Atlanta customers probably have a very different story than most of my farmers. It does not examine a group of farmers over time and how many may have been unsuccessful. Additionally, because this study did not examine farmers over a period of time, it does not tell the story of farmers whose operations failed to succeed. Therefore, this study does not shed light on individuals who attempt to become organic farmers but do not achieve this goal.

With only ten participants, these research findings are limited. However, the findings from this study are not meant to be extrapolated into other settings. The study is intended to serve as a base for further research and to contribute to understanding the diversity of stories among small-scale organic farmers. No single story is the same as another.

IMPLICATIONS

This research affirms that small-scale, organic vegetable farming can be an economically viable profession. Farmers must make a living wage in order to continue their work and the economic sustainability of organic farmers is essential for the long-term growth and maintenance of the organic food movement.

This study raises numerous questions that beg for additional research to better understand the lives of organic farmers. There is a general lack of research about small-scale organic farmers, particularly about those farmers who market their products to customers outside of a metropolitan area. Examining these farmers would provide an

interesting comparison and contrast to this study, particularly regarding the demand for organic products in comparison to the very high demand in Atlanta.

Additionally, I recommend a longitudinal study of organic farmers. A long-term study would examine how different stages of a farmers' life (e.g. as a single farmer, married, with children) impacts production, quality of life, financial stability, etc. While my research analyzed farmers at different stages of their life cycle, it does not provide a long-term analysis of how changes in a farmer's life circumstances impacts their farming business.

Programs should be designed to match eager farmers and generous landowners. Some states have programs that link retiring farmers with beginning farmers to guarantee that the retiree's land continues in farming production, but Georgia does not have one of these programs (Schwartz 2010). However, Georgia Organics has developed an online "Growers' Exchange" forum where individuals can post to a discussion board if they are looking for land to farm or have land they want to sell, lease, or rent to organic farmers. Further research about this forum should take place in order to determine its effectiveness.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research reveals ten possible routes for becoming an organic farmer. It is apparent that there are no "correct" ways to enter this profession and circumstances differ based on experience, age, location, access to land, family, etc. Other than a passion for farming and a willingness to work hard, there are no specific requirements for entry into the world of organic farming:

- You do not have to own land;
- You do not have to own equipment;
- You do not have to come from a farming family;
- You do not need a degree in agriculture.

However, there are trends and patterns that make becoming an organic farmer easier. Most importantly, if you are thinking about becoming an organic farmer, get as much experience as possible before you begin your own operation. Once you begin farming, take things slow, and utilize the knowledge of others. Organic farmers, in my experience, want to share their knowledge with others so do not be scared to ask for help.

Georgia needs more organic farmers to meet the ever-increasing demand for organic produce. Institutions, especially schools, should promote farming and gardening beginning at a young age, even in urban areas.

Lastly, organic farming is about connections: Connection to the land; Connection to the community; Connection to other farmers; and, connection to a social movement. Although these relationships vary depending on farmers' individual circumstances, each farmer has the potential to create meaningful and productive connections in order to make a living while providing the community with safe and healthy food for humans and the environment.

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APPENDIX

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

NOTE: The questions below served as a starting point to focus the interview and were often followed by additional discussion and questions

FARM

Now that I have spent a day working on your farm, I'd like to ask some detailed questions about your farm.

1. Can you give me a brief history of this operation?
   Prompts: When did you start farming this land? How have crop and livestock specializations changed over time? Where does the farmland come from? Who owns the land?

2. Currently, what is the scale of the operation?
   Prompts: How many acres are farmed this year? Last year? What is grown?

3. Where do you sell the products from your farm?

4. Who does the manual labor? Do you have any hired labor? Any volunteer labor? What are the wages of your hired labor?

5. On your farm, what are the key challenges to appropriate organic production practices? What do you do to overcome these?

6. What infrastructure has been essential to your success (e.g. hoop houses, irrigation, growing year round)?

7. What role does your family play on the farm?
   Prompts: labor, additional source of income, owns land

LIFE AS AN ORGANIC FARMER

1. Why did you become an organic farmer?

2. I've heard that starting an organic farm can be expensive. Was this true in your case? If so, what factors allowed you to overcome these financial challenges and start your farm?
   Prompts: family support, a spouse with alternative income sources, skills from farm upbringing, money saved from previous career, no kids or children grown

3. Do you consider yourself a successful farmer? Why or why not?

4. What was your yearly income from the farm last year and what do you project your income to be this year?[10]
   Prompts:
   Do you have any grant assistance?
   What is the role of loans? From where?
   Do you have any other sources of income (e.g. spouse, 2nd job)?
   Could you farm without any supplemental income?
   If so, what is your combined income from the farm and this additional source?
   Is this enough to sustain the quality of life you and your family wish to achieve (or already have)?

5. What percentage of your time do you spend dealing with the business side of the farm?
   Prompts: % on farm/production, marketing, administrative/accounting/taxes, planning

6. Have you ever considered leaving your work as an organic farmer and pursuing another profession?
   If yes: When? Why? What other profession were you considering? What stopped you from doing so?

INVOLVEMENT IN MENTORING PROGRAM:

I'd like to ask you some questions about your participation in the Farmer-to-Farmer Mentoring Program.

1. When did you participate in this program?

2. **Mentors only:** How many people have you mentored through this program?

3. Why did you decide to join this program?

4. Can you describe to me your role in this program?
   Prompts: How often did you work with your mentees/mentor? What did you teach/learn from them?

5. **Mentors only:** I've heard that some people who participate in this program decide not to pursue organic farming. Have any of your previous mentees not become farmers? Why do you think this is so?
6. **Mentees only:** At the onset of the program, where you planning on becoming a farmer after completion of the program?

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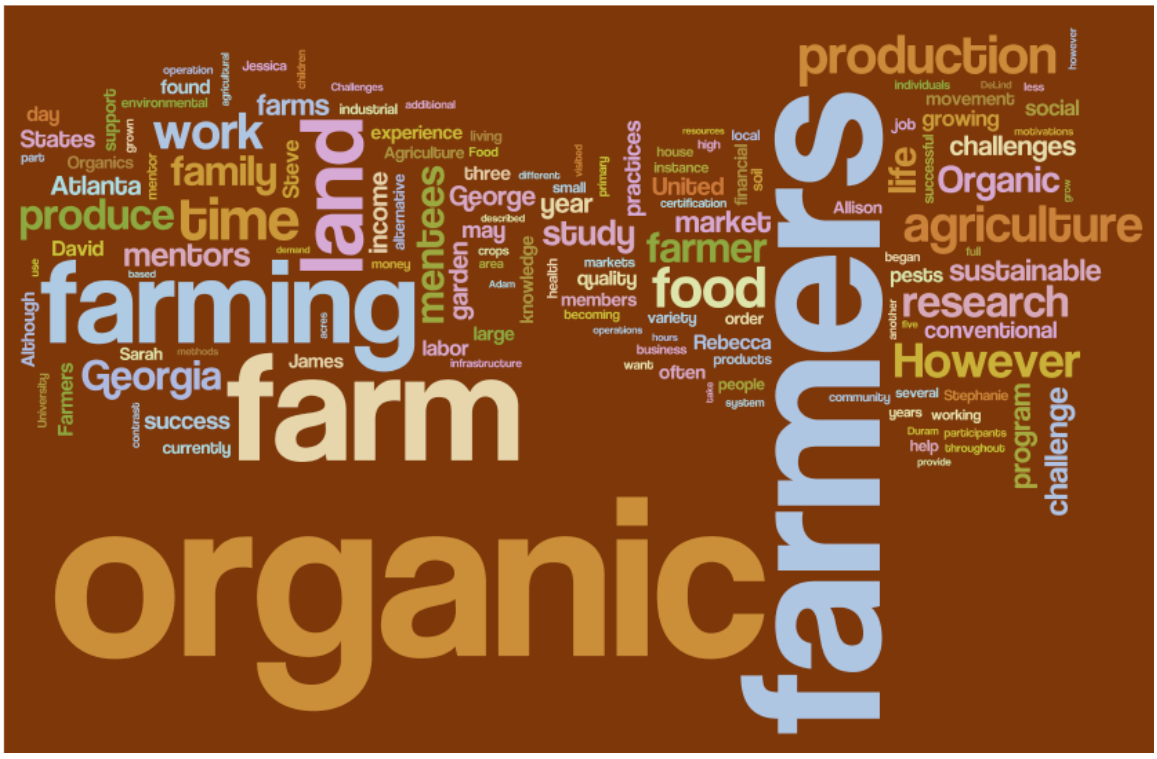
[10] Note: I gauged the comfort level of the farmer before asking questions about financial information. Some farmers did not seem comfortable providing this information so I did not ask this question

CONCLUSIONS:

1. What is your name?
2. Where do you live?
3. How old are you?
4. Are you married? Do you have any children?
5. Since high school, what education have you completed?
6. Is there anything about your life as a farmer and participation in the mentoring program that you feel is relevant that I haven't asked about?
7. Do you have any suggestions for me about how to better conduct my research?

VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THESIS



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